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The Master Craftsman

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THE MASTER CRAFTSMAN

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS

ON

THE MASTER CRAFTSMAN

'There is always a touch of the fairy tale in Sir Walter Besant's romances. . . . He steeps the workaday world in a transfiguring medium, and eerie incidents, impossible coincidences, fine and subtle sentiments, beautiful love stories of pure passion, all appear in keeping. . . . In "The Master Craftsman" Sir Walter Besant's admirers will find no cause for disappointment. . . . It is charming, it is informed with the healthiest spirit, and it is optimistic, chivalrous, picturesque.'—*Daily News.*

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THE
MASTER CRAFTSMAN

BY

WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF

'BEYOND THE DREAMS OF AVARICE,' 'ARMOREL OF LYONESSE,'
'ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN,' ETC.

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THE MASTER CRAFTSMAN

PROLOGUE.

On a certain evening of July, in the year of grace 1804, old John Burnikel sat in his own chair—that with arms and a high back—his own chair in his own place during the summer—not his winter place—on the terrace outside the Long Room of the Red Lion Tavern. This old tavern, which, they say, was once visited by King Charles the First, when he hunted a deer across the Whitechapel meadows, and afterwards took a drink on the steps of this hostelry, was built of wood, like most of the houses on the River Wall. It had a tumble-down and rickety appearance; the upper windows projected, and were either aslant or askew; the gables stood out high above the red-tiled roof, which had sunk down in the middle, and for a hundred years had threatened to fall down; there were odds and ends of buildings projecting over the river, which also had looked for a hundred years as if they were falling into it; the place had never got as much painting as it should have; the half-obliterated sign hung creaking on rusty iron hinges. As it was in 1704, so it was in 1804, tottering, but never falling; ready to drop to pieces, but never actually dropping to pieces.

The red blinds in the window looked warm and comforting on a cold winter's night; and from many a ship homeward bound making its slow way up the river there were wafted signs of satisfaction that Wapping and the Red Lion Tavern and old John Burnikel could be seen once more.

The Long Room was on the first-floor, a room running right through the whole depth of the house, with one great window on the north, and another opening from floor to ceiling on the south. From the window on the north side could be seen in spring a lovely view of the trees and hedges of Love Lane and the broad orchards, all white and pink with blossoms of apple, pear and plum, which stretched away to the ponds and fields of Whitechapel, and to the tall buildings of the London Hospital.

The tavern, from that window, seemed to be some rural retreat far from the noisy town. In the winter, when the company was gathered round the roaring fire, with shutters close, drawn blinds, and candles lit, there was no pleasanter place for the relaxation of the better sort, nor any place where one could look for older rum or neater brandy, not to speak of choice Hollands, which some prefer to rum. For summer enjoyment there was a broad balcony or terrace overhanging the river where the company might sit and enjoy the spectacle of the homeward-bound ships sailing up, and the outward-bound sailing down, and the loading and unloading, with lighters and barges innumerable, in midstream.

The tavern stood beside Execution Dock, and the company of drinkers might sometimes, if they pleased, witness a moving spectacle of justice done on the body of some poor sailor wretch—murderer, mutineer, or pirate—who was tied to a stake at low tide and was then left to expect slow Death; for the grim Finisher dragged cruel feet and lingered, while the tide slowly rose, and little by little washed over the chin of the patient and gently lapped over his lips, and so crept higher and higher till, with relentless advance, it flowed over his nostrils, and then, with starting eyes of agony and horror, the dying man was dead. Then the tide rose higher still, and presently flowed quite over his head, and left no sign of the dreadful Thing below.

There had been, however, no execution on this day. John Burnikel sat on the terrace, the time being eight in the evening, before a table on which was a bowl of punch, his nightly drink. With him, one on each side, sat his two grand-nephews, first cousins, partners in the firm of Burnikel and Burnikel, boat-builders, of Wapping High Street—Robert and George Burnikel. The rest of the company consisted of certain reputable tradesmen of Wapping, and one or two sea-captains.

At this time John Burnikel was an extremely ancient person. His birth, in fact, as recorded in the register of St. John's Church, Wapping, took place in the year 1710. It was not everybody who knew that date, but everybody knew that he had far surpassed the limits accorded to man. Nobody in the parish, for instance, could remember any time when John Burnikel was not visible, and walking about, an old man as it seemed, in a time when, to this riverside people, greatly addicted as they were to rum, a man of fifty was accounted old. Nor could anybody remember the time when John Burnikel was not to be found every evening in the Long Room of the Red Lion, or on the terrace overlooking the river.

Old or not, he walked erect and briskly; he looked no more than sixty; his features were not withered or shrunken or sharpened; he had no look of decrepitude; he had preserved his teeth and his hair; the only sign of age was the network of wrinkles which time had thrown over his face. And when he walked home at night he brandished his trusty club with so much resolution, and in his old arm there was still so much strength, that although the place was lawless, and robberies and assaults were common, and although he walked through the street every night alone, at ten o'clock, nobody ever molested him. Such is the virtue of a thick stick, which is far better than sword or pistol, if a man hath a reputation for readiness in its handling.

The old man lived in one of the small houses of Broad Street, in an old cottage with four rooms, with diamond panes in the window, and a descent of a foot or so from the street into the front-room. The house at the back looked out upon the open expanse of orchards and market-gardens, with a distant prospect of Whitechapel Mount. He lived quite alone, and he 'did' for himself, scrubbing his floors, personally conducting the weekly wash, and cooking his own food. This was simple, consisting almost entirely of beefsteaks, onions, and bread, with beer by the gallon. When he had cooked and served and eaten his breakfast or dinner, and when he had cleaned up his frying-pan and his plates, the old man would sit down in his armchair and go to sleep, in winter by the fire, in summer outside, in his back-yard. He had no books, and he wanted none; he had no friends except at the tavern, and was cheerful without them. At the tavern, however, whither John Burnikel repaired at nightfall, or about six o'clock, every evening, he was friendly, hospitable, and full of talk, drinking, taking his tobacco, and conversing with the other frequenters of the house; and since he was generous, and often called for bowls of punch, grog around, and drams, so that many an honest fellow was enabled to go home drunk who would otherwise have gone home sober, he was allowed, and even encouraged, to talk and to tell his adventures over and over again as much as he pleased. To do him justice, he was always ready to take advantage of this license, and never tired of relating the perils he had encountered, the heroism he had displayed, and the romantic manner in which he had acquired his riches.

For the old man boasted continually of his great riches, and in moments of alcoholic uplifting he would declare that he could buy up the whole of the company present, and all Wapping to boot, if he chose, and be none the worse for it. These were vapourings; but a man who could afford to spend every day from five to ten shillings at the tavern, drinking the best and as much as he could hold of it, treating his friends, freely ordering bowls of punch, must needs possess means far beyond those of his companions. For the village of Wapping, though there were in it many substantial boat-builders, rope-makers, block-makers, sail-makers, instrument-makers, and others connected with the trade and shipping of the Port of London, was not in those days a rich quarter.

The wealthy London merchants, who had houses at Mile End, Hoxton, Bow, Ham, and even Ratcliffe, never chose Wapping for a country residence; and, indeed, the riverside folk from St. Katherine's by the Tower as far as Shadwell were, as a whole, a rough, rude, and dishonest people, without knowledge, without morals, without principle, without religion. The mob, however, found not their way to the Long Room of the Red Lion Tavern.

The old man was always called John Burnikel; not Captain Burnikel, as was the common style and title of ancient mariners, nor Mr. Burnikel, as belonged to business men, but plain John Burnikel without any title at all. And so he had been called, I say, during the whole length of time remembered by the oldest inhabitants, except himself, of Wapping, and this was nearly seventy years.

It was a romantic history that the old man had to tell. He was the son of a boat-builder—a Wappineer—that was well known and certain; the business was still conducted by those two grand-nephews. At an early age he had run away to sea; this was also perfectly credible, because all the lads of Wapping who possessed any generous instincts always did run away to sea, or became apprentices on board ship. No one doubted that John Burnikel was an old sailor. He said that he had risen to command an East Indiaman; this may have been true, but the statement wanted confirmation. His manner and habits spoke perhaps of the f'o'ksle rather than the quarter-deck, but, then, there are quarter-decks where the manners are those of the f'o'ksle. However, in the year 1804 nobody cared whether this part of his history was true or not, and at the present moment, ninety years after, it is of still less importance.

On the visit of a stranger, or on any holiday or on any festive occasion, John Burnikel was wont to relate at great length, and with many flourishes and with continually new embroideries, the series of adventures which enabled him to return to England at an early age—not more than five-and-twenty—the possessor of a handsome fortune. It would take too long to relate this history entirely in the old man's words. Besides, which history — told on which evening — should be selected? Suffice it to say that while it was in progress the company finished one bowl, ordered another, and sometimes finished that while the narrative proceeded. For listening without talking is thirsty work, and a thirsty man must drink or die. And since the punch was paid for by the old man, 'twould be the neglecting of chances and opportunities not to take as much of it as the rest of the company allowed.

The substance of the earlier part of the story was this: John Burnikel was on board the East Indiaman, the *Hooghly*, bound from the Port of London to Calcutta. She had a goodly company of passengers, and was laden with a miscellaneous cargo. They fell into a hurricane in the Indian Ocean. The ship was dismasted, and lost her rudder and her boats; she drifted helpless for many days, and at last struck on a rock. When, after dangers and difficulties of the most extraordinary kind, John Burnikel found himself on shore at last, he was alone, naked, destitute and helpless on a hostile coast, the people of which he declared were notorious cannibals.

They did not, however, proceed to eat him; on the contrary, they clothed him, fed him, and presently took him up country as a present, presumably, to the kitchen of their King, 'or, as in their jargon they call him, gentlemen, their Rajah.'

Here he would break off to reflect upon the situation. Every storyteller loves to take advantage of the reflections suggested by a situation. 'Gentlemen,' he would say, ''tis a melancholy thing to find yourself growing every day fatter and more ready for the spit; even the distinction of being reserved for the private larder of His Majesty could not make me cheerful. What, I ask you, is the idle honour of being served at the table of royalty when one thinks of what you must go through in order to get there? I would compare, gentlemen, in my own mind, that portion of me which might be on the Royal dish—a sirloin or a brisket or saddle—with a leg or a loin of roast pork on our own table; and I would remember that in order for us to get that toothsome loin the animal must first be stuck. 'Twas, I confess, mortifying to reflect that sticking must be undergone.

'Gentlemen, with the utmost joy I discovered that this Prince was too great and too high-minded to be a cannibal. Children of tender years, indeed, as we take sucking pig, he might welcome at his table, but not a sailor grown up and tough. He received me, on the other hand, with a gracious kindness which I cannot forget; he gave me an important office about his person—that of Hereditary Grand Mixer of the Royal Punch—a most responsible office, with a uniform of red silk, and a turban stuck all over with diamonds. This, gentlemen, is the Court uniform of that country. Here we know not what uniform means for splendour.'

The story at this point varied from day to day. Let us select the version most in use. He rendered some signal service to His Majesty, the nature of which was differently told; in fact, it was impossible to reconcile the various narratives, for he discovered a conspiracy, revealed the conspirators at their work, and saved the King and the Dynasty; or he rescued the King's daughter from a fierce man-eating tiger; or he captured the kidnappers who were running off with that daughter; or he snatched the whole of the Harem from a consuming fire; or he healed them all of a dangerous sickness by administering tar-water. In fact, John Burnikel had a most lively imagination, and used it freely. Choose, therefore, the kind of service which you think most worthy of a great reward.

'For this service, Gentlemen, the Great Mogul showed the gratitude of a Christian. He sent for me, and when I fell upon my knees, which is the only way in which His Majesty can be approached, he stepped down from his golden throne and bade me graciously to rise. Then he created me on the spot, a Duke, or a Lord Mayor—I forget which. This done, they gave me a splendid cloak to wear. And then—for the best was yet to come—the Emperor bade me prepare for something unexpected. Ah!'—here he drew a long breath—'unexpected indeed! With that he led me through the golden halls of his Palace, crowded with dancing girls, till we came to a place where there was a heavy door. "Unlock it," says the King. So the door was opened, and we went down a few steps till we came to an underground hall. If you'll believe me, gentlemen, that hall hadn't need of candles to light it up. It was full of light; it dazzled one's eyes only to stand there and look around; full of its own light, for it was full of precious stones—heaps of 'em, boxes of 'em, shelves of 'em, strings of 'em; there they were—diamonds, rubies, pearls, emeralds, opals—every kind of precious stone that grows anywhere in the world. Gentlemen, there was a sight! The diamonds came from the Emperor's own diamond ground—Golconda they call it—where I've been. I will tell you some day about Golconda. The rubies were brought by the King's armies from Burmah. I've been to Burmah, and I'll tell you about the people there some day; cruel torturers they are. The pearls came from Ceylon, where they are got by diving. I've been a famous diver myself, and I'll tell you, if you ask me to-morrow, how I fought the shark under water; you don't know what a fight is like till you tackle a shark under water, with the conger and the cuttle and the codfish looking on! As for the emeralds, I don't rightly know how they got there. I have heard of a mountain in South America which is just one great emerald, and at certain times the natives go with hammers and chop off little bits. I'll go out there next year to see it. However, gentlemen, there we were, the Great Mogul and me, standing in the middle of these treasures. "Jack," says he, "you shan't say that the King of India is ungrateful. For the service you have done me, I say—help yourself. Fill your pockets. Carry out all you can!" And I did. Gentlemen, it is seventy years ago and more, and still I could cry only to think that my pockets were not sacks. However, I did pretty well—pretty well; weigh me against any Lord Mayor of London you like, and you would say that I did very well. Better still, I brought these stones home with me. Best of all, I've got 'em still. When I want money I take one of my diamonds or a handful of pearls. Aha! You would like to know where I keep these jewels? Trust me; they are in safe keeping—all that's left of 'em—and that's plenty—in right, good, safe keeping.'

Was not this a splendid, a romantic story to be told in Whitechapel by a simple old sailor? Nobody believed it, which mattered nothing so long as the punch held out. Yet the old man most certainly did have money, as he showed by his nightly expenditure alone, let alone the fact that for seventy years he had lived among them all at Wapping, and had done no single stroke of work. Among his hearers there sat every night those two grand-nephews of his; they were cousins, I have said, and partners in the boat-building business. They came, moved by natural affection—who would not love an uncle who might be telling the truth, or something like the truth, about these jewels? They also came to learn what the old man might reveal, which would be a clue to finding more; and they came out of jealousy, because each suspected the other of trying to supplant him in the favour of the uncle. They sat, therefore, and endured the story night after night, and endured the company, which was not always of their own rank and station as respectable tradesmen; but still they got nothing for their trouble, because the old man told them no more than he told the rest of the world. Nor did he show the least sign of affection for either. Every evening, when the cousins left the tavern, which was not until the old man had first departed, one would say to the other: 'Cousin George, our uncle ages; he ages visibly. I greatly fear that he is breaking.' And the other would reply: 'Cousin Robert, I greatly fear it, too. Yet it is the way of all flesh.' It was a time when every event had to be received in a spirit and with words proper to the occasion. 'We must resign ourselves to the impending blow.'

'Heaven grant'—the tribute to religion having been duly paid, they became natural again—'heaven grant that we find the truth about these jewels. The story cannot be true.'

'Yet how has he lived for seventy years in idleness?'

'I know not, nor can I so much as surmise.'

'Consider, cousin. He lays out from eight shillings to ten or even twelve shillings every evening at the Tavern. And there are his meals and his rent besides.

Say that he spends twelve shillings a day, or eighty-four shillings a week, which is two hundred and eighteen pounds eight shillings a year. In seventy years this makes the prodigious sum of fifteen thousand two hundred and eighty-eight pounds. Where did he get all that money? Cousin, he has either a secret hoard somewhere, or he has property—houses, perhaps, of which we know nothing.'

'When he dies I suppose we shall learn. A man cannot have his property buried with him.'

Now, on this night, as the company at the Tavern parted at ten o'clock, instead of shouldering his club and marching off, the old sailor turned to his nephews. 'Boys,' he said—he had never called them 'boys' before —'I have something to say. I had better say it at once, because, look you, I think I am getting old, and in a few score years, more or less, it may be too late to say it. Come with me, then, to my poor house in Broad Street.'

The nephews, greatly astonished and marvelling much, followed him. They were going to be told something. What? The truth about the jewels? The nature of the property?

The old man led the way, brandishing his stick, stout and erect. He took them to his house, opened the door, closed it and barred it; got his tinder-box, and obtained a light for a thick ship's tallow candle. Then he barred the window-shutter. His nephews looked round the room. It was the first time they had stood within those walls. There was a table; there was an arm-chair, a high arm-chair in which one could sit protected from the draughts by the fireside; there was a tobacco-box, with two or three churchwarden pipes;

there was a cupboard with plates. A kettle was on one side of the hob, and a gridiron on the other. There was no other furniture in the room. But the door and the window-shutters were both of oak, thick and massive. And on the wall were hung a cutlass and a brace of pistols.

'Wait here a bit,' said the old man. He took the candle and carried it into the other room, leaving them in the dark. After a few minutes he returned, bearing a small canvas sack.

'Nephews,' he said, laying the bag on the table, and keeping both hands upon it, 'you come every night to the Red Lion in hopes of finding out something about my property. It is your inheritance; why shouldn't you come? Sometimes you think it is much, then your spirits rise. Sometimes you think it is little, then your spirits sink. When I begin to talk you prick up your ears; but you never hear anything. Then you go home and you wonder how long the old man will last, eh? and how much money he has got, eh? and what he will do with it, eh? Well, now, you shall have your curiosity satisfied.'

'Sir,' said one of the nephews, 'our spirits may well sink at the thought of your falling into poverty.'

'And,' said the other, 'they may well be expected to rise at the thought of your prosperity.'

'I have told you many stories of travel and of profit. Sometimes you believe, in which case you show signs of satisfaction. Sometimes you look glum when you think that you are wasting your evenings.'

'Oh, sir,' said one of the nephews, 'sure one cannot waste one's time in such good and improving company as yourself.'

'We come,' said the other, 'for instruction. Your talk is more instructive than any book of travel.'

'The time has now arrived'—the old man paid no attention to these fond assurances—'to tell you what I have, and to show you what you will have. I am now grown old, so old that I must expect before many years are over'—he was already, as you have seen, ninety-four—'to die'—he sighed heavily—'and to give my substance to those who come after. Look you! I bear no manner of affection to you. When a man gets to ninety, he cares no longer about anything but himself. That is the beauty and excellence of being old. Then a man gets everything for himself, no sharing, no giving. I shall give you nothing—not even if you are bankrupt—in my lifetime. But I mean not to defraud my heirs. You shall see, therefore, all I have got. Many a rich merchant living in his great house would be glad to change places with you when I am gone—many a merchant? All the merchants of London Town!'

He took up the bag. It was a long narrow bag of brown canvas, quite two feet long, and shaped like a purse of the period.

I know not what they expected, but at the sight of the treasure which he poured out upon the table these two respectable boat-builders gasped; they looked on with amazement unspeakable, with open mouths, with starting eyes, with flaming cheeks, with quivering hands and trembling knees. They could not look at each other; they dared not speak. It was like the opening of the gates of Paradise, with a full view of the interior arrangements.

They had never dreamed of such a sight. Five hundred pounds all in gold would have seemed to these worthy tradesmen a treasure, five thousand pounds great wealth, ten thousand pounds an inexhaustible sum, for this old man poured out upon the table a pile, not of guineas, but of precious stones. Why, then, his stories about the countless treasures of the Great Mogul must be true. There they were—diamonds, emeralds, rubies, pearls, all the stones which he described, hundreds of them, thousands of them; there were precious stones, large, splendid, worth immense sums, with smaller ones, with strings of pearls, enough to fill quart pots. And now they understood what was meant by all those stories concerning precious stones over which they had grown as incredulous as Didymus.

The old man bent over his heap and ran his fingers into it, and caught a handful and dropped it back again. 'See my beauties!' he cried. 'Look at the colours; the sunshine in them and the green and the red. Saw you ever the like? Oh, if a man could but live long enough to work through this heap! Why, 'tis seventy years since I first came home, with this bag in my hand for all my fortune, and there's no difference in it yet. It grows no less; I sometimes think it grows bigger. No man, live as long as he could wish, would work through this heap.'

'May we humbly ask, sir,' said one of them, taking heart, 'how much money is represented by this bag of jewels?'

'I know not. Take this stone; 'tis a ruby. Look at it, weigh it; I sold one like it three months ago for fifty pounds. There are hundreds bigger. Well'—he began to put the stones back into the bag—'I have shown these treasures to you because the time will come—not yet, I hope—it must come, I suppose'—he spoke as if there was still a chance of an exception being made in his favour—'when I must give the bag to you two and go away. I shall have to go aboard a strange ship and join a strange company, as bo's'n, maybe, or able seaman, or cook—who knows?—and sail away in strange waters on a new cruise where there are no charts.'

'Not for many years,' murmured one of the nephews fervently.

'Not if our prayers, our daily prayers, can keep you here!' added the other, clasping his hands.

'Thank ye,' said John Burnikel, tying up his bag.

'I trust, sir,' said one of the nephews, 'that you keep this precious treasure in a safe place. A whisper, a suspicion, would fly through Wapping like wild-fire, and you would be robbed and murdered.'

'Devil a whisper will there be,' said John. 'You won't start a whisper, that's certain. And I won't. And as for the place where I keep it, no one will see me put it there, and no one would think of looking there. And now, nephews, good-night. Say nothing—but of course you will not—and be as patient as you can. I believe you will have to wait a dozen years or so before you get the bag.'

They stepped out into the street, and heard him, to their satisfaction, bolting and barring the door behind them.

'Cousin,' said one, 'this has been a wonderful evening. Who could have believed it? We are now rich men—oh, rich beyond our dreams! We can leave Wapping, and court the society of the Great.'

'Unless his bag is stolen, which may happen. I tremble only to think of keeping such a treasure in such a mean little cottage among all these rogues and villains! It ought to be in a strong room such as merchants use.'

'I think—I fear—we shall not have to wait long.

Methinks the old man's voice is breaking. He seemed feebler to-night than I remember to have seen him. Ninety-four is a great, a very great, age.'

'Ah! he may not have many weeks—many days—to live. His voice, I also observed, was weak. It is a happiness, cousin, to reflect that an uncle who now entertains a disposition of so much justice towards his nephews, can hardly fail of Abraham's bosom.'

This anxiety proved prophetic. Exactly a week afterwards John Burnikel did not appear at the tavern at six o'clock, nor at half-past six. The nephews hurried round to Broad Street. The door was open; there was no one in the front room. In the room behind they found their uncle lying on his bed, his face drawn as with pain, and with the gray look which often falls upon those who are about to die.

'Ah,' he said, 'I thought you wouldn't be long. Come in, boys. Shut the door and come in. I've had a kind of fit; my legs don't seem right. Get me a drink; the barrel of beer is in the other room. I shall be better to-morrow—much better.' He drank a copious draught of beer, which refreshed him. He tried to sit up, but could not. It was a day in August, when it gets dusk about eight. At nightfall they found the tinder-box and got a light, and sat down one on each side of the bed.

So they sat all night till three in the morning without saying a word to each other. The old man seemed sleeping. At daybreak he began to murmur, rambling in his speech.

'The man's mad. He won't know; he won't find out. He will die mad. No one will know—no one will know. Boys'—he opened his eyes—'you both know where the bag is hidden away. I think this is the end.

Well, I've left you rich—half as rich, each of you, as myself.' He closed his eyes. Presently one of the watchers bent over him.

'Cousin,' he said, 'the breath has gone out of the body. Our excellent, wealthy uncle is no more. Nothing remains but to weep for him.'

'Let us find the bag and divide the property,' said the other, 'before we call in the neighbours.'

'It is our sorrowful duty to do so, as his heirs, and quickly, before the thing gets wind."

It was the custom to construct at the head of the great wooden bed of the period a secret box, drawer, or repository. Everybody knew the secret place at the head of the bed. It was an open secret, yet it was commonly used in every house for the concealment, as in a place of perfect safety, of the silver and the valuables.

They searched in this receptacle. The bag was not there.

'It is in this room, because he brought it out of this room. Let us look again.'

Again they searched every corner and cranny for the secret hiding-place. It was not there. There might be some other hiding-place in the bed. It could only be at the head. They tapped and hammered. In vain. Was it on the head of the bed? They climbed up and looked. No; it was not there. Was it under the bed? They looked, but it was not there. Could it be in the mattress? in the feather bed? in the bolster? under the bolster? under the mattress? They lifted the dead man on to the floor, and they examined these places and other constituent portions of the bed. In vain. They lifted their great-uncle back again to the bed, and gazed at each other with anxious eyes.

'It must be in this room,' they repeated. 'He brought it from this room; he took it back.'

They looked round. There was a three-legged stool leaning against the wall, because one of its legs was broken off. There was a sea-chest in the corner—a big, heavy box with a lock, and bound strongly with iron. Ah! the sea-chest. They dragged it out and threw open the lid. Within was a curious collection of miscellaneous property: a big silver watch, a knife, a dirk, an ugly Malay creese, an old pistol, a bo's'n's whistle, a mariner's compass, a bundle of charts, a few trifles in carved wood from India, two or three broken figures from India, a dead flying-fish, together with a bundle of decayed or decaying clothes, which filled up the bottom of the chest. They pulled everything out with eager haste, each man looking jealously at the other for fear he should secretly convey the bag into his own pockets. Everything lay on the floor, and the bag was not in the chest. It was divided into two compartments, a larger and a smaller. They held it up to the light. No, there was nothing in the chest. They looked again about the room. There was a cupboard in the wall. Both discovered it at the same moment and rushed at it. They threw open the door. It was a spacious cupboard; but there was nothing in it at all. Old John Burnikel had never used that cupboard.

'Let us lift the hearthstone,' said one of them. Everybody knows that the hearthstone was often the family bank where money was stowed away for safety when there was no secret hiding-place at the head of the bed. And the family continued to put faith in the hearthstone long after the secret was perfectly well known to those persons who break in and steal.

They did lift the hearthstone. Nothing was under it. The earth had never been disturbed since the stone was laid.

Their faces were now haggard. Could the bag be stolen?

They then prized up the boards of the floor; they tore down the wainscoting; they searched the little back-yard for signs of recent disturbance; they remembered that there were two rooms upstairs; they were empty and unfurnished, but they tore up the boards; they searched in the roof; they searched in the chimneys. Heavens! there was no sign of the bag anywhere. Where was it?—where was it? All that day they searched. The next day—which was indecent in haste—they buried the old man, neither of them attending the funeral for fear of the bag being found in their absence. And then they began again. They wrecked the house; they reduced it to its bare walls of brick; they pulled the bed to pieces; they left, as they thought, nothing unturned. But the bag was not in the house.

Then they began to think that, while the old man lay unconscious, the door open, the bag might have been stolen. But it must have been hidden away, and nobody knew that it was there, or had thought of it——

Then another suspicion entered the heads of both at the same moment. One of them, when it had taken shape with the firm outline of moral certainty, put it into words:

'His last words, George—his dying words—were: "You know where I've put the bag"; and he looked at you—at you. What did he look at you for? Because you know where he put the bag.'

'He looked at you, Robert, not at me. Why? Because he had told you where it was. You wormed his secret out of him.'

'And now you try to turn it off on me. You've taken the bag; you've got it somewhere; you think to take it all for yourself.'

'This impudence passes everything. Do you think I am simple enough not to see through this villainy? 'Tis you—you—you who have taken the bag.'

It is sad to relate that these recriminations became more and more bitter; that the two boat-builders of Wapping—churchwardens, jurymen, most respectable and responsible persons, partners and cousins—did, in the agony of their disappointment, call each other rogue, thief, villain; that they proceeded, being beyond and beside themselves with bitterness, to shake their fists at each other; that they next—it was a fighting age—fell upon and mauled each other; that they only desisted when exhaustion, not satisfaction, compelled them to separate; and that they parted with threats, curses, and promises of Newgate Gaol and the Condemned Cell.

To conclude, the bag could not be found. The agonies endured by those two disappointed men were terrible. To have these treasures just shown to them, dangled before them, and then withdrawn! Heard one ever the like? To conclude, they dissolved partnership. One of them left Wapping altogether, to enjoy at a distance, the other said, his ill-gotten wealth; the other remained to conceal, the first said, the fact of his stolen property. And as for the few remaining goods of John Burnikel—the table, the bed, and the household gear—they were conveyed to the boat-builder's house, and after one more final search the old man's cottage in Broad Street was abandoned.

But the cousins were wrong. Neither of them had the bag, and it remained undiscovered. You shall see how, in the course of this history, it came to be discovered.

CHAPTER I.

'MARRY MONEY.'

'Yes, Sir George,' said the lawyer, looking mighty serious. 'We have at length ascertained how you stand. Your father conducted—misconducted—his affairs without consulting us—and we knew nothing of what was going on—nothing at all.'

I inclined my head. I had already heard certain things which had led me to expect something unpleasant. Now I was to learn the whole truth.

My father, the second Baronet, and son of the well-known judge and lawyer, had died five weeks or so before this interview. He died at the age of fifty-two, having led a perfectly quiet and apparently harmless life. Harmless! You shall see. I was twenty-five, and after the usual run of Eton and Cambridge, I had my chambers in Piccadilly, and my club, and led the life customary among young men of fortune. I knew nothing, and learned nothing, and could do nothing, except play with a lathe. I was not bookish, or artistic, or scientific, or musical, or literary, or anything. Therefore the intelligence that I was about to receive was even more delightful than it would have been to a man who could do things, write things, and sell things.

'You know already,' the lawyer continued, 'that your father met with serious losses on the Stock Exchange?'

'I know so much, certainly.'

'I have here everything ready for you. Before you look at it, Sir George, be prepared for a very—a most painful surprise.'

'Tell me all—at once.'

'Then, Sir George—it is a most distressing communication to make—but you are young, which is the only consolation—young and strong—and, I doubt not, a philosopher——'

'I am especially and above all things a philosopher. But pray get on.'

'Your grandfather, with his magnificent, his unequalled practice, and the habits of prudence which guided all his investments, rolled up what we call, in the profession, a colossal fortune—not colossal in the City sense, but in our sense. It was over a quarter of a million, which your father, then forty years of age, inherited. When he died, five weeks ago, at the age of fifty-two, he had managed by those speculations of his to get through the whole of it—the whole of it—with his country house and his town house. Ah! Sir George, why—why—why did not the Judge entail the whole? It maddens me only to think of it! He has lost all—everything.' The lawyer rubbed it in with resolution. 'You have no longer any fortune left; you have no house; my poor young friend, you have nothing but a few scraps and crumbs left of that splendid fortune that seemed to be yours two months ago.'

'Lost the whole of the fortune? In ten years? He could not.'

'Everything is possible on the Stock Exchange. He has lost it all.'

'You mean that I have nothing. Say it again.'

'Your father, in ten years, lost the whole of his fortune. You have got left, practically, nothing.'

'Thank you. I have got nothing. I shall realize it presently. It makes one feel chilly. I have got nothing.' I put my fingers in my waistcoat pocket. 'Here are some coins. They are mine, I suppose. There are two or three hundred pounds standing to my account at the Bank; are they mine, too?'

'Yes. And to speak of crumbs and scraps, I think I may save a little something for you out of the wreck. But it will be a mere trifle. I estimate it at the most as three thousand pounds.'

'Oh! I have three thousand pounds. You are quite sure you have done your very worst?'

'I can do nothing worse than this for you.'

I got up and stood over the empty fireplace. 'I suppose,' I said slowly, 'that it is very bad. I am not a person of imagination, you know, and I cannot feel, all at once, how bad it is. A thing like this cannot be appreciated all at once. It takes time—it has to get into the system.'

'There is, at all events, something—a solid something, though small,' said the lawyer, watching me with some curiosity to see how I took it.

'Yes, a kind of nugget. It promises to become exciting. I shall become the penniless adventurer of fiction. Should I, do you think, begin to practise billiards? Or does écarté offer a better opening?'

'You must consider, Sir George, when you come to take this business seriously, that many a man with less than that has got on in the world, and made a name for himself, and even amassed a fortune. Your grandfather certainly began with less.'

'The men who get on in the world are the men who start with twopence. Reduce me to twopence, with an introduction to the Lord Mayor, and no doubt I shall get on.'

'Nonsense. Take the thing seriously: think over what can be done with three thousand pounds. It is quite enough, with prudence, to keep you while you are qualifying for a profession, and to start you afterwards—law, medicine, the church, which will you have? Or there are the new fangled professions which used to be trades—science, art, engineering, architecture: you may take up any one of these and qualify for practice with three thousand pounds. Or you might start a horse or cattle farm—there is an opening they tell me, and the rent of land in some places is very low. Or you might buy a partnership in a house of business—three thousand pounds would go a long way in many houses. There are a hundred ways in which a prudent man might invest that sum of money. I assure you, Sir George, that there are thousands of young fellows, as well educated as yourself, who, if they had three thousand pounds to begin with, would feel that all the wealth of Lombard Street was well within their reach. And they'd manage to get a good slice of it, too.'

'Very likely. I don't feel that way at all myself. I am quite certain that, whatever I did, I should get none of the wealth of Lombard Street.'

'I am only pointing out the possibilities of things.'

'You see, I am not that kind of young man at all. And that is not the kind of life that I desire. Money-making—I suppose it is natural to one whose money has been made for him—seems an ignoble pursuit, at the best.'

'Well—well, but permit me, you haven't yet got the true feeling of your poverty. You don't quite understand yet what it means—the difference it makes. When it really gets into your blood and your bones, and you see rising up walls between you and the old world of enjoyment, with prohibitions, and exclusions, and limitations, then, my dear young friend, you will feel stimulated to make an effort in a way that as yet you cannot understand. How should you understand all these evils in a moment? Let me tell you, Sir George, poverty is a terrible thing—a terrible thing. It deprives a young man like you of the chief pleasures of his age; it denies a middle-aged man what most he desires at that time of life, consideration and authority; and it robs an old man of those comforts and attentions and cares which alone can solace his infirmities. I have been poor myself, Sir George, and I speak with full and bitter knowledge. Never say that money-making is ignoble; the methods may be ignoble, but the pursuit is natural, laudable, honourable. Money, my friend, is the only thing—the only thing—that makes life tolerable. Without it there can be no happiness, no independence, no authority, no self-respect. Get money somehow.' The old man spoke with sincerity and conviction. Of course, he was quite right. Yet, as I afterwards reflected, in the possession of money there are degrees. Many an old man with two hundred a year is as happy as another old man with ten thousand a year. Yet some money must be made. Wherefore let every man calculate what he wants for comfort, and money-make up to that standard, and no more.

'Well,' I said, 'I will think it over. At this moment you cannot expect me to have any coherent ideas on the subject. I really do think, however, that there is no one in the world less able to make money than myself.'

'Wait—be patient—and consider what things mean. Heavens! If we could only make young men understand.'

'Well,' I took up my hat. 'If you have really done your worst——'

'Don't go just yet, Sir George. I have one or two things still to say.' The solicitor, whose face generally had more of keenness than of benevolence in it, leaned back and assumed an unwonted expression with more benevolence in it than keenness. 'I confess I was somewhat nervous about this job. To tell a young man that he has no fortune left—a young man who seemed to inherit so enormous a fortune—was rather a formidable task. I congratulate you, Sir George, on your pluck. You take it very well. You might have fallen into a rage, and filled the room with reproaches of your dead father.'

'Since he was my father and is dead, that would be impossible.'

'Quite so. Yet nobody can deny that he has done you a most grievous injury. You bear this calamity, I say, with a fortitude which is astonishing. Let us return to what you might do; you are young, you are well-bred, you are good-looking, you have pleasant manners, you are——'

He lifted his eyebrows into a note of interrogation.

'Clever? No. Nor bookish. Nor scientific. Nor inclined to any of the professions. And ignorant to the last degree.'

'Dear! dear! What a thousand pities this misfortune did not happen twenty years ago! Then you would have been trained to something. Whereas now——' He considered a little. 'Let us think of a few other things. Journalism?'

'I told you, I am not clever.'

'Pity. Journalism requires no capital and no training. I would not recommend the stage.'

'I cannot act.'

'There is one thing we have forgotten, Sir George. You are a young man of good family; you have, therefore, family influence. You must set that to work for you. People think that everything nowadays goes by competitive examination. Ho! ho! The world is kept in the dark entirely for the sake of young men like you. There are quantities of lucky people—commissioners, secretaries, people about the Court, people everywhere—who get in by family influence, and get on by family influence. There are colonial appointments, some of them very good indeed, if you don't mind going abroad. Or you might begin as a private secretary to a rising man. Why, there was a private secretary once who became a peer. The best thing you can do is to go to your own people.'

'Unfortunately it is no use. I haven't got any people. My mother was the daughter of a simple country clergyman, and her relations are all middle-class professional folk. My grandfather married as soon as he began to get on at the Bar—his wife belonged strictly to the middle-class. The Judge's father was a West End builder—originally an East End boat-builder. I remember that because there is a romance in the family about an old sailor and a bag of diamonds. My great grandfather's cousin and partner secretly stole that bag of diamonds. That caused a dissolution of partnership and destruction of cousinly affection. The real reason why my grandfather was sent to the Bar was because the old man thought that if there was a lawyer in the family his cousin might be prosecuted, and so his share of those jewels might be recovered. But the prosecution never came off.'

'Odd story. I wonder how much truth there is in it.'

'Not much, I dare say. But the point is that we are quite a bourgeois lot, and that I do not possess in reality, though I have got this trifling handle to my name, either family, friends or influence.'

'But you do possess your title. And believe me, Sir George, if you are careful you may find that it is a very valuable possession indeed. By means of your title you may once more join the wealthy classes. Thousands of women, rich women, daughters of wealthy men, would give anything for a title. Find out where these women are—in York, in Bath, in Birmingham, in Liverpool, in Manchester, here in London. Get introductions, and you will find your path smoother for you.'

'Marry money?' I shuddered.

'Do not misunderstand me. You are not expected to marry an old woman, or an ugly woman. There are as many nice girls and pretty girls who have money as there are old women. Marry money, young man. Marry money. It is the easiest thing in the world for you to do. And, I am quite sure, quite the most pleasant. As for love, it is all imagination. And, besides, why shouldn't you love a rich girl as well as a poor girl?'

'No. Not to be thought of.'

'Well, if you won't marry money, there is the City. A baronet's name still, even after the many rude shocks of these latter years, looks well on a board of directors. You would find it quite easy to get put on the Direction somewhere or other. The qualification is not a great deal. What do you think of that?'

'Why—as I know nothing whatever of business, it would be a kind of fraud on the shareholders. I should undertake duties of which I know nothing.'

'Generally the interests of the shareholders in the appointment of directors is the very last thing the promoters consider. They want the shares taken up.'

'Then it would be still more a fraud upon the shareholders. That way won't do.'

'Sir George, I fear I cannot help you. These are the existing ways of making money. Choose. If you will have none of them, then we come back to the easiest way—marry money—and if you refuse that——' He spread his hands, meaning, 'then you must starve.'

I walked away thoughtfully. About the fortitude and the pluck I say nothing. One must not, in these days, sit down and cry. At the same time, it was with a very heavy heart that I mounted to my chambers—Plantagenet Mansions, eighth floor, about half-way up.

'Marry money, marry money,' said the solicitor.

The words kept ringing in my ears like the tolling of a bell.

For, you see, in order to marry money I had no occasion to go to New York or to Bath or Manchester or Birmingham. The money was actually waiting for me with the marriage. I had only to reach out my hand and take it, and with the money, the owner of it. And not an old woman, at all; nor an ugly woman; nor a woman maimed or halt in mind or in body; a woman, eminently desirable, beautiful, wealthy, well-born, and of sweet disposition. Attached to the marriage there would be certain conditions, but such as most men would consider quite light, easy, and tolerable conditions.

'Marry money—marry money—marry money.' The words rang in my ears like the ringing of a bell.

So the first effect of the wreck and ruin of my fortune was a great and strong temptation, a voice urging me to reach out my hand and take this fortune which lay ready waiting for me.

'Marry money! Marry money!' said the man of large experience and of many years.

I turned mechanically into the room called my study. It was really my workroom. It was fitted with a lathe and with a bench. On the wall were hundreds of tools, bright and glittering. There was a shelf of books, technical books about carpentering, wood-carving, cabinet-making, fretwork, iron-work, and the like; there were 'blocks' ready for use; there were boxes and other things, finished and unfinished, chased, rounded, polished. The lathe represented my one talent.

I looked at the machine thoughtfully. 'If I could only make money out of you. And now, I am very much afraid, I shall have to sell you for what you will fetch—tools and block and all. Pity! Pity!' I laid a loving hand upon the bright and delicate machinery. I wish it had sighed, or groaned, or done anything by way of sympathetic response. But it did not. Even in romance machinery is not responsive.

'Marry money,' whispered the voice.

Was there no way by which I could earn a livelihood? You, who have been carefully taught from childhood that you have your own way to make in the world; who have served an apprenticeship; who have learned the mystery of a craft; who have learned the way of work, the ordinary groove; who have become keen; who have lived in City houses, where they think of nothing but business—suppose you were thrown into the world at five-and-twenty, with no special knowledge whatever. Do you think you would sink or swim?

'Marry money,' said the solicitor. 'Marry money.'

On the walls hung the portraits of ancestors. I had three, which is one more than most of us can boast. Yet it is not exactly a long line of ancestry. The portrait of my father hung in the middle—to the living, reigning Prince belongs the place of honour. It showed a man of neat and even sleek appearance, clean-shaven, gray-headed, with mild eyes; a man of no marked character, one would think. The shallow observer would set him down as a man who could do no harm. Quite wrong. There is no one so mild and meek that he cannot do harm. 'To think,' said his son, addressing the portrait, 'that you have done this mischief—you! Why did not the painter give you eager, starting eyes, and trembling lips, and a flushed cheek? Lying painter!' But to reproach a portrait is next door to reproaching the person it represents. I turned to the next picture, that of my grandfather, the Judge, in wig and robes, looking very much like Rhadamanthus.

'All your money is gone, my lord. Do you understand? All the money that you scraped together. It is gone—lost—wasted—thrown away. You have doubtless met your son by this time. Perhaps he has explained things. Don't be hard on him.'

On the other side hung the portrait of the builder. 'What do you say?' I asked. 'How do you like the fall of the family fortunes? Perhaps you can advise something practical.'

'Marry money! Marry money.' Was it the voice of the builder?

Portraits seldom respond. Spiritualists should look to it. There would be no need of incarnating a spirit if you could make him speak out of his own portrait. I turned away from these silent, unsympathetic effigies and began mechanically to turn the lathe. But my mind was not with the work; I laid down the block, and sat down. Again the solicitor seemed to be addressing me.

'Marry money—marry money.'

I saw letters lying on the table, and tore open the first, the one whose handwriting I knew. It was a woman's.

'DEAR GEORGE' (I read),

'I am anxious to learn the result of your talk with the lawyers, and what you have really lost. Come and see me as soon as you get back.

'Yours,

'FRANCES.'

I left the other two letters unread.

'Marry money—marry money,' said the solicitor.

I opened a drawer, and took out a dainty case of red velvet bound with gold. It contained a single photograph. It was the portrait of a girl, and showed a very striking face—the face of a queen or a princess. Her name was surely Imperia, certainly a *grande dame de par le monde.* A most regal face; the brow and cheek ample; the eyes large and steady; the features clear and regular; the lips firm; the chin rounded; everything about this woman large, including her mind; a woman whom the common herd would fear, though they might reverence her. It would require either a brave man or a presumptuous man to make love to her. Her eyes looked out of the picture with a kindly light.

'There is no woman like Frances,' I thought. 'And yet——'

When one has been brought up from childhood side by side with a girl, seeing her every day, a girl a little older than one's self, and a great deal cleverer, the affection which one feels for that girl partakes of the brotherly emotion. Therefore I said, 'And yet——'

'Marry money—marry money,' this importunate solicitor continued.

Yesterday, perhaps—I don't know—it was possible; to-day, no. My father, when he threw away my money, threw away that possibility. Frances vanished from my grasp gradually—in wild cat mines, in gold reefs, in Central African railways, in Central American bonds.

Again, like a song of rest and happiness, came the temptation:

'Marry money—marry money.'

'She is a beautiful woman,' continued the Tempter; 'she loves you, after a fashion. You love her, after a fashion. You know each other. She is so rich that she will not care about the loss of your fortune. It is all nonsense about brother and sister. Marry her—marry the Lady Frances, who is waiting for you.'

I let these voices go on for half an hour or so. It was rather amusing, I remember, to feel one's self tempted; but, of course, one had to stop it some time. So I put down my foot, and said resolutely: 'No.' Upon which the two voices became silent, and spoke no more.

CHAPTER II.

'TRY POLITICS.'

'Now, George, what have you got to tell me?'

Lady Frances, daughter of the famous Earl of Clovelly, once, twice, three times Premier, and of the even more illustrious Countess, the last of our great political ladies, was also the young widow of that distinguished statesman, old Sir Chantrey Bohun, who died in harness as Secretary of State for India. She was a year older than myself, a difference which, when we were children together, and next-door country neighbours, gave her a certain superiority over me. She married, for political reasons, at the age of eighteen; her friends were all political friends. It was generally understood that, after a decent interval of two or three years' widowhood, she would marry a second time, and play over again the *rôle* so admirably enacted by her mother. For the moment she closed her town-house, and when she was not in the country lived quietly in a flat, seeing few people.

She was sitting beside the window, into which poured a flood of vaporous sunshine from the west, for it was a day in early April, when the sun sets about seven. The warm, soft light wrapped her as in a cloud, under which her lace was soft and luminous. Truly, a most lovely woman, but to me not a woman who inspired love. These brotherly affections sometimes interfere with things that might have been.

'Sit down, George, and tell me exactly all about it.'

'I would rather stand. Well, to begin: I told you, Frances, about that astounding father of mine—how he secretly gambled and speculated and lost money on the Stock Exchange.'

'Yes; you told me, and it was the most amazing thing that I ever heard. Your father, of all men! The quietest man in the world—meek, even, if one may suggest such a quality in a man. Yes, decidedly meek. Whenever I hear of meekness my thoughts will now turn to your father rather than to Moses. And yet a speculator!'

'It is, as you say, the most amazing thing. However, one would not have minded this curious discrepancy between appearance and reality if he had only lost a few thousands. He had a quarter of a million to go upon—a few thousands might have been allowed him. But, Frances, he has lost everything—actually every penny.'

'Every penny, George?'

'Every penny. He began, I say, with a fortune of nearly a quarter of a million when he was forty, and when he died the other day at fifty he had nothing—nothing at all. Had he lived six months longer he would have been a bankrupt. He has lost everything. The way of it is all shown in a bundle of papers. Perhaps some day I shall be curious enough to read them.'

'Oh, George! nothing left? Why, it is impossible!'

'Unfortunately, it is quite possible. I am a pauper, Frances, except for a few scraps and crumbs.'

'My poor George!' Frances held out both her hands. 'I am so sorry—so very sorry. But people like us don't become absolute paupers. There is always a something left after the most terrible catastrophe. You spoke of scraps and crumbs.'

'The fragments that remain amount to about three thousand pounds, I understand—an income of ninety pounds a year. That is what I meant by the scraps and crumbs.'

'It does not seem much, does it? But, then, money is the most elastic thing in the world. My sovereigns are all sixpences. I know some people whose sixpences are all sovereigns. Of course, you have not begun to make any plans for the future?'

'Not yet.'

'Now, George, it is the strangest thing—you will never believe it; I have no fancy for ghostliness—but yesterday evening I certainly had a presentiment. I was sitting alone, and the thought suddenly flashed across my brain: Suppose that George, by any accident, was to find himself without any money at all! And, behold, you come this morning and tell me that your fortune is gone!'

'A strange presentiment, Frances!'

'Then I thought it over. I could not arrive at any conclusion, because, you see, there is always the uncertainty of what a man will do. With a woman it would be easy. The problem divided itself into three questions: What effect would poverty produce on George? How would George bear it? and, What would George do with poverty? I could find no satisfactory answer to any of these questions. And now you will actually answer them yourself.'

'As for the first question, I don't know what the effect will be—I may become a sandwich-man. We shall see. As for the second, I mean to bear it as philosophically as I can. For the moment that is tolerably easy. The important question, however, is, "How will he bear it in a twelvemonth or so, when the pressure is really felt?"'

'No, that is part of the third question: "What will he do with his poverty?" You see, George, poverty is a possession, just like wealth. It has its responsibilities and its duties. In a better world than this we should have the nobler spirits all working their hardest, and striving with each other to assume poverty, even with its responsibilities. Benedict and Bernard and Francis of Assisi all understood what poverty might mean, and the question is, What will you do with it, George?'

'It is only an hour or two since the truth was sprung upon me. I am trying to think it over. I shall sell my horses and furniture, to begin with. I shall then move into a garret somewhere. Once in my garret, I shall begin to think away, like another Darwin.'

'Sit down, George, in my chair.' It was the lowest, longest, and most luxurious chair in the room. Sitting or lying in it, one looked completely under the control of anyone standing over the chair. Frances got up to make room for me. 'So, obedient boy! Now let me talk.'

'I listen, Frances. I still have ears.'

'The first duty of poverty—call it rather responsibility—the lower kind call it the privilege of poverty—is to accept the—the—sympathy and friendly advice—and——'

'The sympathy and the advice, Frances, by all means.'

She became very grave. 'George, we have known each other so long that I can talk to you freely and openly. How long have we been friends?'

'About twenty-two years. Ever since we were able to run about.'

'That is a long time, is it not? And always friends.'

'Always friends—always the best of friends.'

'And we have always talked to each other freely, have we not?'

'Quite freely and openly. You have been the greatest happiness of my life, Frances.'

'And you of mine. So that we owe each other a quantity of things: gratitude, friendship, even—even, if necessary, a little sacrifice of—not principle or self-respect—say of pride.'

I knew very well what was coming. Anybody might have guessed.

'The greatest happiness of poverty—that which ought to make it the most coveted of all possessions—is that it constantly commands proof of the affection and interest felt towards one. That is a great thing, is it not?'

'I feel it already, Frances, and I am much touched by it.'

'Very well. So that poverty is already working for good in your heart.'

'Nay. Even when I was disgustingly rich I never doubted your interest in me.'

'The next thing about poverty is that it must make men work, and may develop all that is best in them. Some men never find themselves—their own power—their lives are ruined—because they are never forced to work. That has been, so far, your case.'

'No, Frances. I should have done no good if I had worked like the busy bee.'

'All my life, George, much as I regard you, I have been thinking how much better you might have been. Oh! I don't mind telling you. You have never done any work at all. You went to school, and you idled away your time there; you went to Cambridge, and, of course, you idled away your time there. There has been no necessity. You have never worked because you must. Oh! I wonder that rich men ever achieve anything, seeing that no one teaches them the duty of work. I wish I had a school of rich boys. I would make them work harder than the poor boys. They should learn to work because they ought.'

'I am not clever, Frances. Work of the kind you mean is impossible for me. I was designed by nature for nothing better than a cabinet-maker. I believe I shall turn cabinet-maker, and so develop my higher nature and make you proud of me at last.'

'Not clever! Nonsense! You have never found out your own abilities; you are so ignorant in consequence of your abominable laziness that you do not know even what you can do.'

'I can turn boxes. They come out, sometimes, quite pretty boxes.'

'All the time, George, I have been growing up side by side with you—the incomplete or undeveloped George—and with the complete George, a nobler creature; working when you remain idle; filled with ambition while you are content with obscurity. He is such a splendid man, George—and so like you, only better-looking.'

'That may very well be. If I were to find myself as you call it, I should find a very dull and plodding fellow not half so pleasant as the incomplete other—the undeveloped fellow who had not found himself.'

'Not dull at all. You have never done even common justice to yourself. Few men have such good natural abilities as yourself. Why, you show it in everything you do. If you have to make a speech it is full of wit; if you write a letter, it is running over with observation and humour; whether you ride, or shoot, or play games, or work at your lathe, you do it better than anybody else. Believe me, George, I know you better than you know yourself, better than anyone else knows you, because we have been friends so long.'

'Well, Frances, if it please you—and if it goes no farther; for this is not a thing to be bruited abroad—I will accept all the attributes of genius.'

'Then we come back to the question, what will you do with your poverty?'

'And again I reply that I cannot yet, for the life of me, imagine. My lawyer has been advising me to go into the City as a Guinea-pig—that is, to lend my name to bogus companies at a guinea a sitting. It seems that if a man with a title will sell his name, people can be swindled with much greater ease. That does not look a promising line, does it?'

Frances shuddered. 'George, you are a gentleman!'

'Or I might use my small capital to qualify for a profession — there is my grandfather's line; but even allowing for those great abilities with which you credit me, I really could not read law.'

'Anything else?'

'Oh yes. Some men, it appears, buy a partnership in the City; some become stockbrokers.'

'I don't think that would suit you.'

'And some go out to California, fruit-farming. And that, Frances, seems the most hopeful line, so far.'

'Is that all that you can think of? Very well. Now let me suggest something for you—a much better line than any of these. You know what has always been my hope for you.'

'I know that you have sometimes dreamed of the impossible.'

'Yes—and—now—now that you will have no other distractions, now that you can begin and keep before you the goal—now, George, is the time for you to realize this dream of mine. Make yourself a career in politics.'

'My dear Frances, I could more easily make myself a career in mathematics.'

'Nonsense! You have the capacity; you want nothing but the will—the ambition. George, cannot I make you ambitious? Think—ask yourself—can there be anything nobler, more worthy of ambition, than to guide the destinies of a nation?—to make the history that will have to be written?'

'Put in that way, it certainly sounds very well.'

'Oh! They talk about poets and writers. What are the men who write about things compared with the men who do things? For my own part, I would rather be Bismarck than Shakespeare: no poet can render service to his country that can compare with the statesman who makes it great and powerful. There is no honour to compare with the honour, the gratitude, the immortality, which we confer upon such a man. No poet is to be named in the same breath with such a man.'

'I have long since made up my mind, Frances, that I will not become a poet. Whether, in consequence, I shall become a Bismarck—I doubt.'

She paid no attention to this remark.

'I have thought it all out. The thing is perfectly easy—for a man like yourself. You must belong to a party: you let them know that you want to enter the House on their side; you are a likely man and a promising man; they will find you a borough; you will contest that borough; you will win. Once in the House, you will work your way quickly or slowly, and command the attention and respect of the House and the recognition of your party, and so, by gradual steps, achieve a place even in the Cabinet. Why, my dear George, it is the experience of every day.'

I got out of the low and luxurious chair with some difficulty. One cannot be serious lying on one's back. And now I felt very serious. 'You see your statesman at the end of his career,' I said, 'distinguished if not respected. You do not understand how he has worked his way upwards, by what a tortuous path he has climbed. Moreover, you only see the greatest man, the leader. Now, my child, the kind of statesman I think of is the ordinary person who becomes towards the end of his career a Cabinet Minister. That person does not strike me as a noble character at all. Indeed, there cannot be much nobility left in a man, so far as I can see, after twenty years' service of party. Think of the slavery of it; think of the dirt he has had to eat; think of the lies he has had to tell; think of the coat he has had to turn; think of the tricks he has had to practise; all to get votes—all to get votes!'

'You exaggerate, George.'

'No, I do not. However, it matters nothing what I think. The House is quite out of the question. I cannot afford it. You forget, Frances, that I have no money.'

She blushed crimson, she dropped her eyes, she trembled. 'George,' she said, with hesitation and embarrassment, 'again—do not be proud. It is the privilege of friendship—it is your privilege to let me find that—the means—you must accept of me.'

This was the great temptation. All that I had to do at that moment—I knew it would come—I was waiting for it—I was prepared for it—all that was wanted—of course I could not take the money she was offering—all that was wanted was to speak vaguely about ambition, to fall in with her hopes and dreams—one can always accept a dream or offer a dream—and the woman and her fortune and everything would be mine. Because I knew very well—a thousand indications had told me—that she loved that nobler and more complete George of her imagination—not myself at all. I had only to pretend to be that nobler person, as full of ambition, as resolute for distinction. As for being in love, why, if you are always from childhood in the company of a girl, the passion called love, if it is awakened at all, is weak and puny compared with that which deals with the mystery of the unknown and strange. Still, there was the beautiful woman, my old friend, who only wanted to believe that I was strong and ambitious, and I only had to pretend. It was like the temptation of the Christian martyr—only a little pinch of incense—just one—and life and freedom, the enjoyment of the sunshine, were granted to me.

I took her hand and raised it to my lips. 'Twas the refusal of the Christian martyr. 'Not that way, Frances,' I said. 'Any way but that. I am going out of the world—up or down, I know not which. But, up or down, it cannot be by any such help as that.'

CHAPTER III.

THE COUSIN.

In these days of self-restraint we neither weep nor rage; we pour out neither lamentations nor curses. People used formerly to accept evil fortune with all the outward indications that the bolt of fortune had gone home.

When a young man of the old days lost his fortune, or his mistress, or both, I believe that he thought no scorn to let his wailings or his curses be heard by all the world. In these days the young man walks to his club—perhaps it will be his last appearance there—dines as usual with his everyday face and his smile for a friend, and presently goes home.

I am but a child of my generation; therefore I did this, and at ten o'clock or so I returned to my chambers.

Outside the door I found, to my astonishment, waiting for me, a man whose appearance was not familiar to me. Perhaps a man with a little bill; but, then, I owed no man anything to speak of. Besides, ten o'clock is late for the man with the little bill. Perhaps someone from the stables; but, then, it was late for a messenger from the stables. The man was young, tall, and well set up; dressed well enough, but hardly with the stamp of to-day's Piccadilly.

'Are you Sir George Burnikel?' the man asked bluntly, without taking off his hat or touching the brim in the way common with servitors and messengers.

'I believe I am. But I do not seem to know you.'

'May I have ten minutes' conversation with you?'

'Certainly not, unless I know who you are and what you want. So, my friend, as ten o'clock at night is not the most usual time for a call, perhaps you will go away and write your business.'

'I have come a good step,' he persisted, 'and I have waited for two hours. If you could see me to-night, Sir George, I should be very much obliged.'

'Who are you, then?'

'My name is Robert Burnikel. I am a cousin of yours.'

'Never heard that I had any cousin of that name, I assure you.'

'I am a distant cousin. I do not want to beg or to borrow money of you, I assure you. I came in the hope that you would listen to me, and perhaps give me some advice in a matter of the greatest importance to myself. By trade I am a boat-builder; I carry on the same business, in the same place, that your great-grandfather did before he quarrelled with his partner and left Wapping.'

After such an introduction I had no more hesitation, but I turned the key and threw open the door. 'Come in,' I said; 'I am sure it's all right. The hereditary calling of our family is boat-building. The head of the family should always be a boat-builder. Come in.' I led the way into the study, and touched the switch of the light. 'Now,' I said, 'if you like to sit down and talk I will listen. There are soda-water bottles and the usual accessories on the table, with cigarettes.'

My visitor declined the proffered hospitality. Now that he had taken off his hat and was sitting under the bright electric light, the cousin appeared at first to be merely a good-looking young man with a certain roughness of manner as of dress. But as I looked at him, I became gradually aware that this young man was most curiously like myself. I have broad shoulders, but his were broader; I am tolerably tall, but he was taller; my head is pretty large, but his was larger; my forehead is square, but his was squarer; my nose is straight, but his was straighter. Even his hair was the same, and that grew in short, strong brown curls all over his head—the kind of hair that is never found decorating the skull of an ordinary weak-kneed Christian. The hair of Mr. Feeblemind and Mr. Ready-to-halt is invariably straight; therefore I have always been pleased to have stubbly, curly hair. His voice, too, was like my own, only stronger and fuller. To complete the resemblance, I had the short, broad fingers of a workman. These fingers force a man to buy a lathe; they never gave me any peace until I had got the lathe. My visitor had exactly the same hand, but it was larger. Strange, that upon so many generations a resemblance between two cousins should be so strong.

Mr. Robert Burnikel took a chair and cleared his throat. ‘It is a personal matter,’ he said, ‘and it is somewhat difficult to begin.’

‘Looks like borrowing money, after all,’ I thought. ‘If I may suggest,’ I said, ‘tell me something of the family history. It is ninety years since the connection of my branch with yours was broken off. I am, I regret to say, shamefully ignorant of my own people.’

‘Well, Sir George, there was a boat-builder at Wapping died about the year 1780. He wasn't the first of the boat-builders by a hundred years and more; you will find his tomb—one of the fine square tombs—on the south side of Wapping Church. This shows that he was a man of substance and responsibility. The churchyard is full of Burnikels. If you think it worth while to be proud of such a thing, you belong to the oldest and most respectable family of Wapping.’

‘Of course one likes to feel that one has respectable ancestors.’

‘That old man, who died at the age of eighty-five, was great-great-grandfather to both of us.’

‘I see. Our cousinship starts a hundred years ago. It hath a venerable aspect.’

‘He left two sons at least. Those two sons carried on the business in partnership until they died or retired. Then two of their sons—I don't know anything about the rest—took it over as partners. They quarrelled; I dare say you have heard why’—he looked up quickly and paused—‘and they dissolved partnership. One came to this end of the town, and became a builder; the other stayed at Wapping, and his son, and his grandson, and his great-grandson—that's myself—have conducted that business ever since. I am now the sole owner of the concern.’

‘It is rather bewildering at first One would like it in black and white, though I never understood genealogical tables. However, the point is, that your branch of our family has remained at Wapping, carrying on the old business, all these years. I fear there has been no intercourse between the two main currents of the stock.'

'None, I believe. But we were able to follow the fortunes of your branch.'

'There were other offshoots, I suppose—tributary streams, cadet branches—with you as with us?'

'Yes; some of us are in Australia; some are in Canada; some are in New Zealand; some are boat-builders; some of us are farmers; some of us are sailors; we are scattered all over the world.'

'And none of you rich?'

'None of us are rich. Your great-grandfather, though he called himself a builder, of course had no necessity to work.'

'No necessity to work? Why not?'

'Why, on account of his immense wealth.'

'Wealth? He had very little. Although, as to work, he was a most industrious person. He stamped his stucco image all over Kensington; he has become a name; he points architectural epigrams; he is the hero of the Burnikel age in this suburb. But he made very little money. Where did you get your notion of his enormous wealth?'

'Well——' The cousin looked doubtful, but for the moment he evaded the point. 'Then one of his sons became a lawyer; and so, of course, his father being so rich——'

'Again you are misinformed. My great-grandfather left a moderate fortune, and my grandfather had his share of it, and no more.'

'We always understood, to be sure, that your grandfather, being so rich, was able to buy his place as Judge and his title.'

At this amazing theory, I jumped in my chair and sat upright. 'Good Lord, man!' I cried, 'where were you—where could you be—brought up? Where do they still preserve prejudices pre — pre — pre-mediæval?'

'I was born and brought up in Wapping.'

'Can remote Wapping be such a God-forsaken country as to believe that Judges buy their seats? Are you so incredibly ignorant as to believe that?'

'I don't know.' He coloured. 'Perhaps we were wrong. They said so. I never questioned it; I never really thought about it. My grandmother used to tell us so.'

'Your grandmother! Permit me to say, newly-found cousin, that my respect for the Wapping grandmother begins to totter. My grandfather was made Judge for the usual reason—that he was a very great lawyer.'

'He died worth a quarter of a million.'

'Well, and why the deuce should he not? If you make from five to ten thousand a year by your practice, and only spend one, and go on doing that for thirty years, and get five per cent. all the time for your money, you will find yourself worth all that at the end of the time. But why are you telling me all this stuff about my own people? Have you got something up your sleeve? Have it out, man.'

'Well, Sir George, the story of that bag of diamonds and things has never been forgotten. It rankled down to my own time. My father used to grow gloomy when business was bad and he thought of the diamonds.'

'What had that to do with my grandfather?'

'And the fortune that the Judge was reported to have left behind him—a quarter of a million—was exactly the value that old John Burnikel set upon the diamonds that your great-grandfather took.'

'My great-grandfather took? Man, you've got a bee in your bonnet. It was not that much-injured old man, but your great-grandfather — yours — who, I always understood, took the jewels.'

The cousin laughed gently, but shook his head.

'That was the story they told you, of course. Why, it is nearly a hundred years ago, and we have always been quite narrow in our means, working hard, living carefully, and spending little—never a rich man among us. Those of us who were not in the business went to sea; not a single man died rich.'

'Then,' I said, 'you must have buried the precious diamonds. My great-grandfather left no more than a few thousands to his children, and my grandfather had great difficulty in keeping himself until his practice began and increased.'

'Well, they always told me——'

'If you come to that, they always told me——'

'If the bag was not taken by your great-grandfather, who could have taken it?'

'Yours, my dear sir—yours.'

'For no one knew of its existence except those two and the old man John Burnikel. And they found him dying and the bag gone. Not dead, or the bag might have been stolen by someone else; but sick and dying, and it was gone.'

'Well, Mr. Burnikel, you are a stranger to me, and I think I will not discuss any farther the delicate question as to who stole a bag ninety years ago. My ancestor certainly did not, and I do not wish to accuse your ancestor. Perhaps the bag was stowed away somewhere: in a bank; in a merchant's strong-room——'

'He was only a simple sailor. He knew nothing about banks or strong-rooms.'

'The person who took it—not necessarily your ancestor, and certainly not mine—put it somewhere, and died without revealing the secret. If you come to think of it, a bag of diamonds into which you dipped whenever you wanted to sell one was rather a dangerous kind of thing to keep. Boat-builders, as a rule, do not keep bags of diamonds lying loose. It is somewhere hidden away in your back-garden, perhaps.'

'Not ours.'

'Or perhaps there never was any bag of diamonds at all.'

'Oh yes, there was. We've got the old sailor's bed at home with the secret hiding-place at the head, and his chest brass-bound——'

'The empty chest proves the existence of the treasure, I suppose. However, that's enough about the bag of diamonds. You have not told me why you came here to-night. Not, I take it, to talk over the Legend of the Lost Treasure.'

'Well, Sir George, I thought to myself, we've always talked so much about that bag of diamonds, that if I mentioned the thing, there would be, perhaps, a feeling—a kind of sympathy—you to have all and me to have nothing. As it is, I can't understand what you say. I suppose we have been all wrong.'

'Let us acknowledge this bond—the common bond of a long ago common loss. And next?'

'The reason why I came here this evening is this: You know the world, and I do not. I want your advice. It is this way. I mean to rise in the world. Wapping is all very well—what there is of it. But, after all, it is not everything.'

'Not everything, I suppose.'

'It is, in fact, only a corner of the world. I mean to get out of it.'

'Very good. Why not?'

'I see everywhere men no better than myself—not so good—working men, getting distinction on the School Board and on the County Council, and even'—he gasped—'even Elsewhere,' he said, with a kind of awe. 'And I don't see why I should not get on too.'

'Why not?—why not? If you like the kind of work.'

'In short, Sir George—you will not laugh at me—I mean to go into the House.'

'Why should I laugh at you? And why should you not go into the House if you want to, and if a constituency will send you there?'

'I will show you afterwards, if you like, on another occasion, my chances and my fitness.'

'To-night you will explain to me where I come in—why you come to me. I am the worst person in the world to advise.'

'I do not ask advice about my own intentions,' said the political candidate stiffly. 'I advise myself. I am going into the House. What I want you to tell me is this—I have no means at Wapping of finding out how one sets to work in the first instance, how you let people know that you are going to stand, how you find a borough, what it costs, and all the rest of it. If you can give or get for me this information, Sir George, it is all that I shall ask you, and I shall be extremely obliged to you.'

'I can't give it, but I can get it for you, I dare say. At all events, I will try.'

'That is very kind of you. Let me once get it'—the man's eyes flashed—'and I will succeed. I am an able man, Sir George—I am not boasting; I am stating a plain fact—I am a very able man, and I shall get on. You shall see. You shall not be ashamed to own your cousin. I shall rise.'

He did rise, perhaps to illustrate his prophecy. He got up and took his hat.

'I know exactly what I want,' said this confident young man—yet the arrogance of his words was tempered by a certain modesty of utterance—'and I know how to get it. But I must get into the House first. I've planned it all out. It takes time to make one's way. In five years' time—I only ask five years—I shall be Home Secretary.'

'What?'

'Home Secretary,' he repeated calmly. 'Nothing less than that to begin with.'

'Oh, nothing less than that!'

'After that I don't say, nor do I even think. Why, there are a dozen men now in the House who have gone in like me in order to get distinction. I read the debates, and I see how these men get on. And I understand their secret, which is open to all. I'm not going to join any party. I shall be an Independent member, and I shall rise by my own exertions and my own abilities.'

I remembered that afternoon's dream about myself. Good heavens! And here was this man—of my own name, of my own age, so much like myself, this cousin—coming to me with exactly the ambition desired for me by Lady Frances! Was this man who called himself a boat-builder—perhaps in some allegorical sense—really myself? The builder of a boat might be the builder of a man. Was this cousin my own nobler self, the complete and fully-developed George?

'I should like,' my visitor continued, 'to show you that I am not an empty boaster. Let me call again. Or perhaps you would wish to see the place that you came from. Come to Wapping to see me. The yard is not a bit changed. It is just what it was two hundred years ago when the first Burnikel came to the place. Come at any time; I am always there.'

'Thank you. I will call upon you to-morrow afternoon. Good-night; and, I say, when you have nothing better to do, dig up the back-garden, and find that precious bag. It may help to pay your election expenses.'

He departed. I remained strangely disturbed. After all the events of the day—the loss of fortune, the fatal absence of ambition—to meet this man—arrogant, presumptuous, ignorant. Home Secretary to begin with! A tradesman of the East End! And yet—yet there was something in the calm confidence of the man, and in the look of strength. But—Home Secretary to begin with!

CHAPTER IV.

WAPPING.

How does one get to Wapping? It is not, I believe, generally known that there are trains which take the explorer to this secluded hamlet. They are the same trains which go under the Thames Tunnel. Before entering upon that half-mile of danger, the engine stops at a station, dark and uncertain, deep down in the bowels of the earth, and unprovided with a lift. It is a fearful climb to the top of those stairs, but when you do arrive, you find yourself in the very heart of the quarter—in fact, in Wapping High Street itself. This is one way of getting to Wapping. Another, and a much better way, is to walk there from Tower Hill, past St. Katherine's Docks, where you may drop a tear over the wanton destruction of what should have been Eastminster, the Cathedral of East London, the House and Church of St. Katherine by the Tower, with its Deanery, its Close, its gardens all ready for promotion, and even, like Westminster, its adjacent slums. The traveller then enters Nightingale Lane, wondering when the nightingale was last heard here, and presently finds himself in a long riverside street. Tall warehouses and wharves are on the south side; on the north side, offices. North of the offices are the Docks. Between the warehouses are stairs. Here are Hermitage Stairs, and since there is a Hermitage Street, there was probably at one time or other a hermit established on this spot. A most desirable spot it must have been for a hermit of a gloomy turn, being then a moist, swampy, oozy, marshy, tidal kind of place, most eligible for any hermit who desired all the discomforts of his profession.

In those days the place was Wapping-in-the-Ouse: afterwards it became Wapping-on-the-Wall, and a dry place, without even a frog or an evvet, or a single shake of ague. And then the hermit fled in disgust to Canvey Island, and only the memory of him now remains. Then one comes to Wapping Old Stairs; a name for ever for the sake of the Faithful One; and Execution Stairs, where they drowned people, tying them to a stake up which the rising tide gradually crept—oh! how gradually, how slowly!—till it came to the chin and the lips. Then the bargee, going up with the flood, saw above the surface of the lapping wave, half a face, white, with staring eyes that took their last look of the sunshine and the ships and the broad river, while the water rose a half-inch more, and life indignant fled!

Then one saw a black, brown or red lump above the water, with floating hair—for sailors wore it long; then this too disappeared, and there was nothing left but the top of the stake and the quiet whisper of the water as it flowed past. For three times, ebb and flow, that criminal remained upon his stake; the first for the doing unto death; the next two for an example unto the young and a terror unto evil-doers. After that they took him up and buried him, or hung him in chains, tarred but not feathered. Gruesome are the memories of Execution Dock; many are the ghosts who haunt, all unseen—because there is nobody in wharf or warehouse after business hours to see them—the spot where they were done to death. It was, however, lower down the river, round the Isle of Dogs, that they hung up the black body in creaking chains until it dropped to pieces.

If you want to see the river—the view of the river was the pride of Wapping until the warehouses replaced the old gabled timber-houses—go down one of the lanes which lead to the Stairs. Then you will obtain a panoramic view set in a frame—a tall, narrow picture, a section of the busy river, across which pass all day long up or down the great ocean steamer, the little river steamer, the noisy tug, the sailing-ship, the barge laden with hay, or iron, or casks, down to the water's edge, the wherries, with which this part of the Thames is always crowded. What they do; what makes them so full of business and zeal—no one can discover.

Beyond the river are the mills and granaries and warehouses of Rotherhithe, with the white steeple of the church. The lane in which you stand is, in fact, a much finer kinetoscope than Mr. Edison has invented; it presents you with a picture of ceaseless, changeful motion; of restless activity; of ordered purpose.

Then go back and resume your walk along the street. It is, like the river itself, a busy highway of trade; the tall warehouses were built for trade; the cranes are out on the topmost floor, conducting the trade; men are swinging out heavy bales of goods and lowering them into waggons, which will distribute the trade among other hands. The street, indeed, is full of waggons loaded and waggons unloaded; waggons standing under the cranes, waggons going away loaded and coming back empty. You would not believe there were so many waggons in London. Except for the drivers of the waggons and the men in the upper stories tossing about the bales, there are no people to be seen in the street. Passengers there are none. Nobody walks in Wapping High Street except to and from his warehouse or his wharf. He goes there on business. Of shops there are but two or three, and those not of the best. And this is Wapping. It seems at first to be nothing but a narrow slip between the river and the docks. This is not quite true, however, as we shall presently see.

I entered the cradle of my race, fortunately, by the best way, the Tower Hill way. It seems a cradle to be proud of; all ancient crafts are honourable, but some are more honourable than others; surely boat-building is a very honourable craft. Consider: Noah was an eminent boat-builder; the finest example of his work has never been surpassed; we are all descended from Noah, therefore we ought all to have boat-building instincts. As to the antiquity of boats, it goes back beyond the time of Noah. The first boat, if you think of it—the only way to get at prehistoric history is to think of it—was a cradle, a wicker basket cradle, lined with soft fur ; there was a baby in it—an antediluvian Patriarch baby. The cradle—I am giving away quite a new Archæological discovery—was placed by the child's mother by the riverside, and left, but only for a few minutes ; then the waters suddenly rose and swept the cradle away ; the agonized mother saw it in the midst of the flood, pursued by a hungry crocodile. She looked to see the cradle sink ; it did not, it quietly drifted into a bank or haven of refuge, the baby unhurt, and the baffled crocodile sullenly sank to the bottom. Hence arose the building of the first boat, the shape of which, and of all boats to follow, was copied from the cradle. The first boat-builder, I believe, was named Burnikel, whose grand-daughter married Noah's father. However, it was not so much out of pride in the boat-yard that I came to Wapping as from the desire to see more of this strange, strong, resolute, ambitious cousin of mine.

Of course, I had never been here before. Men of my upbringing know nothing, hear nothing, and understand nothing, of the busy life, the productions, the exports, the imports, the enterprise, the risks, the fluctuations, the skill, the courage, which belong to the trade of our great ports. The merchant adventurer is unknown to us. We ignore, or we despise, the men by whose enterprise we actually live. Not that we understand this ; yet it is a hard fact that the gilded youth depends upon the trade of the country as much as the merchant who directs, the shopkeeper who distributes, the very waggoner and the bargee, and the man who slings the bales upon the crane. Money, you see, can no longer be carried about in sacks of gold. It must be invested: and every investment, whether gas, or water, or railways, or mines, or trading companies, or municipal bonds, or even consols, depends upon the success of a venture. And since agriculture is dead or dying, there is nothing left except those ventures. Should they fail, should disaster suddenly overtake the British industries, then the whole wealth of the country would vanish at once, and the youth of Piccadilly would be as penniless as the poor fellows of the warehouses, thrown out of work. But this the youth of Piccadilly knows not. I know these things because I have been made to learn them.

For the first time, therefore, I found myself in the midst of trade, actual, visible, tangible—fragrant, even. It was a kind of discovery to me. I walked along slowly revolving the thing. Exports and imports one reads about: they are words which to me had then little or no meaning. Here were people actually exporting and importing with tremendous zeal. The street was a hive of industry. Not one face but was full of business; not one but was set, absorbed, serious, observing nothing because it was so full of thought. No one lit cigarettes; no one lounged; no one talked or laughed with his neighbour. All were occupied, all wrapt in thought. All walked with a purpose: no less a purpose, indeed, than the winning of the daily bread, or the creation of a pile on which the children—which would be the very greatest misfortune for them—could live in idleness.

Presently I came to the mouth of the London Dock, where a swing-bridge crosses the narrow entrance, and is rolled back on hinges to let the ships pass in and out.

It was open when I reached the place, and a ship was slowly passing through: a three-masted sailing-ship, of which there are still some left. I watched the beautiful thing with the tall masts and shrouds—man never made anything more beautiful than a sailing-ship. Looking to the left, I saw the crowded masts in the dock; looking to the right, I saw the ships going down the river, and heard the dulcet note of the Siren. All this meant, I perceived dimly, buying and selling. The ships bring immense cargoes to be sold in London and distributed everywhere. All the selling must be at a profit, otherwise these waggons would not be employed, and these warehouses would be closed, and Wapping-on-the-Wall would be as silent and as solitary as Tadmor-in-the-Desert. All this buying and selling meant the employment and the maintenance of millions. Trade, I began to understand, is a very big thing indeed—a thing which demands enterprise and courage; which requires also knowledge and skill; which abounds with chances and changes and perils and hopes.

The ship passed through: the bridge swung round: I passed over it and continued my way. At this point Wapping widens and becomes a right-angled triangle, whose hypothenuse is the river and whose altitude is the East London Dock. This triangle, with the riverside street, is all that the docks have left of old Wapping village. On this occasion, however, I did not discover the triangle; I walked on, the street continuing with its warehouses and its wharves and its river stairs.

A little beyond the bridge I came to a house which would have arrested my attention by its appearance alone, apart from the name upon its door-plate. For it was a solid red brick, eighteenth-century house. The bricks were of the kind which grow more beautiful with years. The door, with a shell decoration above it, was in the middle, and there was one window on each side of it. In the two stories above there were three windows in each: the roof was of warm red tiles. There were green shutters to the lower windows: a solid, comfortable old house. It was well kept up: the paint was fresh; the windows were clean; the steps were white; the brass door-plate, which was small, was burnished bright, and on it, in letters half effaced, I read the name of Burnikel.

'The cradle!' I thought. 'Here was born the ancestral builder of boats. But where is the yard?'

On the other side of the street stood a huge rambling shed—two sheds side by side, built of wood and painted black. Through the wide-open door I saw the stout ribs of a half-built barge sticking up in readiness to receive the planking of her sides. And there was the sound of hammers. And, to make quite sure, there was painted across the shed in white letters the name 'Burnikel and Burnikel, Boat and Barge Builders.'

I stepped in and looked round. There were one or two unfinished boats beside the big barge; wood was lying about everywhere, stacked on the low rafters of the roof, in heaps, thick wood and thin wood; there were tools and appliances—some I understood, some were new to me. Men were working. At the sight of all this carpentry work, my spirits rose. This was the kind of work I loved. A beautiful place, such a place, I thought, as I would like to work in myself. Even in those early days, you see, I had a soul above a lathe in a study. A lathe is a toy; this yard was for serious work. And picturesque, too, with its high roof and its black rafters, and its front open to the river, commanding a noble panorama, wider than is afforded by any of the stairs in those narrow lanes.

Nobody took any notice of me. The men just looked up and went on hammering. A well-ordered yard, apparently.

At that moment the master came out of a little enclosed box in the corner, called 'Office,' which was big enough, at least, for a high desk and some books.

At the outset, in the evening, I had remarked the curious resemblance of my cousin to myself. By daylight the resemblance was not so marked, partly because the man was so much bigger. He was one of those men with whom a simple six-foot in height makes them tower over all other men. He looked tall and broad, and strong above any of his fellows. So looked Saul. He looked around him quickly as he came out, as if to see that his men were all working with zeal and knowledge. Then he stepped across the yard and greeted his visitor gravely.

'I saw you come in,' he said. 'I only half expected you, because, I thought, why should you want to see the old place ?'

'Well, I did want to see the old place. And I wanted to see you again.'

'Here it is, then, and here I am. Not much of a place, after all, but there's a tidy business done here, and always has been, and no change in the place since it was first put up, and that's two hundred years ago. Just the same ; the yard is the same, the beams of the roof are the same, if the tiles have been removed, and the work is the same. If your ancestor was to look in here, he'd see nothing changed but the workmen's clothes. They've left off aprons, and they've left off stockings. That's all.'

'Good. We are thus in the last century.'

'Yes. The river's changed, though. The Port of London was a much finer place formerly, when there were no docks, and the ships were ranged in double line all down the Pool, and all the landing was done by barges—Burnikel's barges—and the river was covered with boats—Burnikel's boats — cruising about among the ships. We'll go for a cruise if you like, any day, in my boat. It is the old boat; here she is.' The boat was lying in the river, made fast to the quay pile. 'We used to board the ships as they came in for the repair of their boats. Now there's no need. They all go into dock. There are some pictures over the way of the river in the last century. You shall see them presently.'

'Thank you.'

'We can't make better boats now than they made a hundred and fifty years ago; we can't put in better work nor better material. They knew good work. Everything except steam things they knew how to make, then, far better than we do now. Burnikel's barges are built after the old pattern. This barge, for instance'—he laid his hand on a rib of the unfinished craft—'she is built on eighteenth-century lines.'

'She looks substantial enough.'

'She is. Well. Look around you, Sir George. This is where your great-grandfather worked, and your great-great-grandfather, and so on, ever so far back. This is where you came from.'

He took his visitor over the little yard, pointing out something of the craft and mystery of boat-building.

'All this,' I said, 'interests me enormously. You know I've got a lathe, and I know a little how to make things—useless things. It is all I can do—my one accomplishment.'

'There's not many of your sort who can do so much. Well, there's not much here to make a show, but there's a good deal to learn in boat-building, let me tell you.'

'I ought to have boat-building in the blood,' I observed. 'The mystery seems familiar to me. Don't you think that so many generations of boat-building—with this little break of just two lives, one a Judge, and one a—nothing—ought to make me take to the trade naturally, as a duck to water?'

Robert Burnikel answered seriously. He was a very serious young man. Besides, light conversation is unknown at Wapping.

'Why not?' he said. 'Natural aptitude must come with generations of work. There is a kind of caste in every trade. I know a succession of carpenters, from father to son; and a succession of watchmakers; and a succession of blacksmiths. These men of mine are all the sons of boat-builders; they grew up in the trade. I don't think they could have done anything else so well. As for you—well, your grandfather was a Judge.'

'For the first time in my life, I am ashamed to say that he was.'

'Not that you need be ashamed, I suppose, but, still, he broke the succession. All the rest of us have always been boat-builders or sailors.'

'For the moment I feel an enthusiasm of boat-building. The only practical work worth considering is this. I am convinced it is the hereditary instinct.'

'Well, you can't know anything about it, instinct or not.'

'I suppose, now, that you could make a boat yourself, with your own hands, from keel to gunwale, from stem to stern?'

'He would be a poor kind of master who couldn't do anything better than his men. I used to work, hammer, and saw, and plane, with the men when I was a prentice.'

We talked about boats and boat-building till the subject was exhausted. The Master Craftsman looked at his watch.

'Four o'clock,' he said. 'Now come over the way. I live in the old house built by the first of them who came here. We can talk for an hour or so before tea. I told them you might be coming to tea.'

CHAPTER V.

THE FAMILY HOUSE.

The old house proved to be even older than it looked. 'It was built,' said the present owner, 'by the first of the Wapping Burnikels. I don't know where he came from; but he was already a man of substance when he built this house. That was in the time of James the Second. It was close by here—at a low riverside tavern—that Judge Jeffreys hid himself, and it was our ancestor who discovered him and gave him up to justice. At least, so they say.'

Within, it was the house of a solid and substantial merchant, who understood the arts of comfort. The Hall was wainscoted with a dark polished oak relieved by a line of gold along the top, and lit by a broad window on the stairs; it contained no other furniture than a tall old clock ticking gravely, and the large model of a boat under a glass case. The staircase was broad and stately: such a staircase as is impossible in a narrow London house, where the unhappy tenants have to climb up and down a ladder. Robert Burnikel opened the door of the room on the left. 'Come in here,' he said, 'till tea is ready. We can talk at our ease in here. This is my own room.' He looked around with some pride, not so much in the old-world beauty of the room, in which anyone might have taken pride, as in the things which belonged to, and proclaimed, his own studies. It would be difficult indeed to find anywhere a more beautiful room. The walls were of panelled cedar, dark and polished ; over the mantel was a mass of carved wood, grapes in bunches, vine-leaves, scrolls, branches, heads of Cupids, all apparently thrown together upon the wall, but there was method in the mass ; the fruit and the leaves formed a frame round a shield on which were blazoned—or and gules and azure, in proper heraldic colours, a coat-of-arms.

'Why,' I cried, 'those are my arms ! I thought they were granted to the Judge as the first "Armiger" of the family. He had them already, then. This is very curious. We were a family of gentlefolk.'

'As if that matters !' said the representative of the race. 'There's always been that Thing belonging to us.'

'The man who built this house may have been a pretender, but I doubt it. People did not assume arms so readily in those days. It was a kind of robbery.'

'Oh ! the arms are ours fast enough, if we want them. I've got an old seal upstairs with the first boat-builder's arms on it.'

'Where did he come from ? Do you know ?'

'I don't know. That's his portrait, perhaps. And perhaps it isn't. Why inquire about the dead ? We are only concerned with the living.'

On one side of the mantel hung a portrait in oils of a dead and gone Burnikel. He wore white lace ruffles, a white lace neckcloth, a colossal wig, and he had the smooth, fat cheek and double chin of his generation, which was a bibulous, armchair-loving generation.

'I believe,' Robert repeated, 'that this is the man who came here first, but it is not certain. It may be his son or his grandson. Did you think really that your family began with the Judge, Sir George?'

'Well, I never heard much about his predecessors, except that story of the lost diamonds.'

'Now you see. The first man of whom we know anything builds this fine house, lines it with cedar and rosewood, and oak wainscoting; adorns it with wood-carving——'

'That overmantel work might belong to a later time,' I interrupted. 'It looks like Grinling Gibbons, though. He may have done it—or perhaps one of his scholars.'

'And had a coat-of-arms. He was a gentleman, I suppose, if you care about that fact. I don't. Gentleman or not, he did not despise the craft of boat-builder.'

'Yes, I do care about that fact. Gentility is a real thing, whatever you may think. I am very glad indeed to recover this long-lost ancestor.'

On the other side of the mantel was a large oval mirror. Its duty, which it discharged faithfully, was to catch the light, and so to relieve the room of some of the shadows which lay about in the corners, shifting from place to place as the day went on, until the evening fell, when the candles were reflected in the polished walls, and the room was ghostly to those who ever thought upon the dead and gone. One side of the room, however, was completely spoiled as regards the original intention of him who clothed it with cedar by the introduction of a bookcase covering the whole wall, and fitted with books. There was a central table littered with papers, and a smaller table with a row of books. And there were only two chairs, both of them wooden chairs with arms—the students' chair. The books, one might observe, had the external appearance of having been read and well used; the bindings being cracked or creased and robbed of their pristine shininess. I looked at them. Heavens! What a serious library of solid reading! Herbert Spencer, Mill, Hallam, Freeman, Stubbs, Hamilton, Spinoza, Bagehot, Seeley, Lecky, and a crowd of others for history; Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall, Wallace, and more for science; rows of books on the institutions of the country and on the questions of the day.

'These are my books.' Robert pointed to them with undisguised pride. 'I don't believe there's a better collection this side of the Tower. I collected them all myself. You see, my people were never given much to books. My father in the evening smoked his pipe. His father smoked his pipe in the evening. The girls of the family did their sewing all the time. They didn't want to read. All the books we had stood in two shelves in a cupboard. They were chiefly devotional books. "Meditations among the Tombs," "Sermons," "Reflections for the Serious," "Pilgrim's Progress," and such-like—mighty useful to me. So I had to collect my own books. And, mind you, no rubbish among them all—no silly novels and poetry and stuff—all good and useful books. And, what's more, I've read them every one, and I know them all.'

I now began to understand how he had been training for the post of Home Secretary.

'I wish I had read half as many,' I said. 'I assure you that I seldom feel any curiosity as to what may be inside a book.'

'Well, if you only read what most of 'em do you are quite as well out of it. Novels! Sickening love-stories —I've tried that kind. And poetry! Pah! Now, here on these shelves is something worth reading. These books have made me the man I am.'

'I suppose,' I ventured, 'that you are not married?'

'No, I am not. No, sir. Marriage holds a man down just where it finds him. If I were married I should be wheeling the perambulator, fidgeting about the children, insuring my life for the children, saving money for the children, running for the doctor. No. I shall marry some day—when I have succeeded. Not before.'

'Then, you have a mother or a sister living with you?'

'No. Father died five years ago, and there were left my mother with myself, two brothers and a sister. The business isn't good enough for more than one. So my two brothers went off to Tasmania, and they've started a yard of their own, and they tell me it's going to pay. My mother went out to see them, and I think she'll stay. You see, mother is a determined kind of a woman; she'd always been master here, father being an easy kind of man, and she wanted to go on being master. Now, there can't be two masters in this house. So, when she came to understand that, she concluded to go. My sister Kate went with her. Kate wanted to be master too. So it's just as well, for family peace and quietness, that they did go away. I'm all for peace, and always shall be, but I mean to be master in my own house.'

The speech revealed things volcanic; the son of the mother, the mother of the son; the sister of the brother, the brother of the sister—all masterful, and all striving for the mastery. And the son getting the best of it. So he made a solitude, and he called it peace.

'And you are left all alone in this great house?'

'No. Some cousins of mine—not your cousins—mother's cousins, live here and keep the house for me. They are a retired skipper and his daughter. The daughter does the housekeeping. She is also my secretary, and keeps the accounts of the place over the way. She's a clever girl in her way, always right to a farthing with the accounts; and she copies things for me when I want passages copied. Can't follow an argument, of course. No woman can.' This is to have lived all your life at Wapping. 'You'll see her presently. I've told her, by the way, if that matters—only I want you to understand how I stand, and what sort of a man I am—that I shall marry her one of these days, when I have got on. Not before. You see, I want a wife who won't be thinking all the time about her clothes and company and stuff. I train my own wife in my own way. It may be ten years, or twelve years, or forty, that she'll have to wait. Of course,' he snorted, 'she doesn't expect any fondling and kissing and foolishness.'

'Poor girl!' I did not say this. I only murmured, 'Yes, I see, of course,' in the usual way when one is surprised, and a coherent reply is difficult.

'I only tell you this because I am consulting you about myself, and you ought to know everything. Otherwise, it's a perfectly unimportant affair.'

'Only a woman.'

'That's all. One must marry, some time, and it's as well to know what you are about. Not that I'm afraid of any woman. Still, it saves trouble to get your wife into proper order before you begin.'

'My own opinion, quite. Whether it will be my wife's opinion or not I cannot say.'

Here was a gallant lover for you! Here was an ardent lover! Here, in the language of the last century, were flames and darts, and pains and madness of love! He was going to wait for ten or twelve or forty years, until he had achieved the object of his ambiiton; and there was to be no fondling, and the future wife was to be reduced to proper order!

'And now,' said the man of ambition abruptly, 'about that information that you promised to get for me. That's what we came here to talk about, not coats-of-arms and girls. Have you got it?'

'I have been to see a man whom I know. He is a politician; he lives in politics; he thinks about nothing else. And I spent this morning with him discussing your case—much as you told me last night. I can only tell you'—I felt a little embarrassed, for obvious reasons—'what he told me.'

'Go on. What did he say? That a boat-builder from Wapping mustn't dare to think of the House?'

'Not at all. They don't mind much what a man is by calling. What I understood last night is this: You wish to go into the House and to make your way upwards by your own abilities, alone. You will force the House to recognise you.'

'Yes. My model is John Bright. I've got his speeches, and I know his history.'

'But John Bright became in the long-run a Party man.'

'John Bright was a power in the country as an independent member long before he went into the Cabinet. I want to be a power in the country.'

'Well, my friend says that the time of the Independent

Member is gone. The only way to get on, nowadays, is to belong to a Party from the outset. Do you know what that means? You have to fall in and obey orders; you must not advance opinions of your own unless they happen to be those of the Party; you must vote as you are told; you must advocate whatever the leaders do. When you have proved yourself a good servant—trustworthy, unscrupulous, and loyal—then, and not till then, if you fit in other respects, and if there is nobody in the way, and if you are personally liked by the Cabinet, and if there is any vacancy into which you could be pushed, then, and not till then, you might get promoted, and so rise.'

'Oh,' he snarled again defiantly, 'we shall see. What next?'

'You will, of course, belong to the Liberal side. All the men who want to get on enter on that side, because the others have got young men of their own. If you do not know a constituency where you think you would have a chance, the Party, supposing they approve of you as a candidate, will perhaps find you one. They've always got a list of boroughs where they want a good candidate. Then you must set yourself to become agreeable to the electors; you must stay there, lecture them, humour them, coax and cajole and flatter and fawn to them—my man didn't say all this, but he meant it—above all, you must promise them everything they want. It is perfectly easy, though it does seem rather dirty work. But it has to be done, and by yourself, because it can't be done by deputy.'

'I shall not do it.'

'As you please. You know that there is a Party Committee in every borough. You will have to study that Committee, and all the members. Lastly, you will have to undergo the process of heckling, which a man of your temper will, I imagine, find extremely disagreeable.'

'I shall get in, Sir George, without any of these tricks; and I shall get in as an Independent Member. I will neither fawn to my people nor flatter them. I shall say: "Here am I, your candidate; elect me." And I shall go in pledged to neither side.'

'Then, my cousin, between the two you will fall to the ground.'

'No; I shall succeed. You do not understand yet, Sir George, that you have to do with a very able man indeed.'

This kind of talk may be arrogant and offensive; but Robert Burnikel was neither. He made an arrogant assertion with a calmness which was modesty. He advanced it as one who states a scientific fact. Belief in himself was a part of the man's nature. More than this, as you will see: he succeeded in convincing those who heard him.

'Now for my fitness,' he went on. 'Listen to this. First of all, there's nobody like me in the House at all. I am a Master Craftsman. Formerly there were hundreds of crafts all carried on in London. They made everything. There were in every craft the masters and the men. The master knew the craft as well as the men. I make what I sell. I am not a shopkeeper; I make. That is a great difference, because it helps me to understand the Labour Question—work, wages, hours, and all the rest of it. There are working men in the House: shopkeepers, manufacturers, lawyers, country gentlemen; but the Master Craftsman the House hasn't got, and it wants him badly.'

'Well?'

'That is not all. This place, so secluded and cut off by the docks and its river, is a little world in itself. You can study everything in Wapping. I know the working of the whole system—parish, vestry, County Council, School Board, everything. I understand the education business, because I know my own men and their families, and what they want, and the foolishness of what they get. I understand the Poor Law business. I know all about the Church, the parish, the school, the workhouse, the parish rates. That's practical knowledge. But that is not enough. One must understand principles. All institutions are based on principles. So I have read Herbert Spencer and Mill, and all the books that treat of practical things and what they mean. There is an ideal standard in every institution—the thing aimed at—and there is a practical level which is as near as we can get. They are sometimes very wide apart; they are kept apart by the selfishness of the men for whom the system has been devised. We must never lose sight of the ideal, and we must work steadily to bring the attainable nearer to the ideal.'

'Go on.' I grew more and more interested in this man—this strong man.

'Well, I read the debates every day. Nothing interests me in the paper so much as the debates. Day after day I say to myself, when I read the rubbish that is talked there: "This is wrong; this is ignorant; this is foolish; this is mischievous; this man doesn't understand the first facts of the case." And so on. Because, you see, when a man has got the workings of one single parish like this firmly fixed in his mind, with the history and the meaning of every institution in it—and they are all in it—from a coroner's jury up to a General Election, he's got an amount of practical knowledge that covers nearly the whole field of home politics.'

'Well, but you are as yet untried in oratory and in debate.'

'Not at all. I went into the Blackwall Parliament at sixteen; at twenty I led the House. I can speak; not to pour out floods of slushy talk. I tell you I can speak. I have studied the art of oratory; I have read all I could find on the subject. I have also read many great speeches—Bright's, above all. I told you just now, Sir George, that I am an able man. I now tell you that I am an eloquent man. I know that the House doesn't want claptrap. I spoke at Poplar last winter, and I made 'em laugh and made 'em cry just as I chose, and because I wanted to try what I could do with them. That was only claptrap. I can speak better than that. And as for my voice, listen: Do, Re, Mi——' He ran up and down the scales not only with correctness and ease, but with a flexible, rich, and musical baritone. 'That's good enough for anything, isn't it? Why, as soon as I found I had a voice, I rejoiced, because I knew that for such work as I resolved, even then, to go in for, a voice is most useful. I went into the church choir in order to learn the use of it. I sing there every Sunday for practice. I didn't want to sing in the choir; it wastes good time; but there is the practice. Nothing like singing for keeping the voice flexible.'

'Very good—very good indeed.'

'Well, I have told you everything. What do you think about my fitness to go into the House to-morrow, and to rise in it?'

The question was meek. The manner was aggressive. It said plainly, 'Deny, if you dare, my fitness.'

At that moment the door was opened, and a girl's head appeared. 'Tea is ready,' she said, and disappeared.

'Let us go in to tea,' I said; 'and then I will answer your question.'

CHAPTER VI.

'TEA IS READY.'

TEA was served in the room on the other side of the Hall. Like the study, this room was a lovely old room also, completely wainscoted with cedar. There were the same carvings over the mantel—fruit, flowers, grapes, leaves and branches, and the shield with the family coat-of-arms. The room was, however, lighter than the study, partly because it contained in each of the upper panels family portraits, and on the panels below oil-paintings representing the river as seen from the boat-yard, with its ships, barges, hoys, lighters, boats, and all the life and motion and business of the river in the last century. So little regard for art was there in the family that no one knew who had painted these panels. Yet it was no mean hand which had designed and executed them. Many indications pointed to the daily occupancy of the room by the household. In the window, for instance, stood a small table, with a work-basket placed there out of the way. There was a sideboard—period, the second George—of mahogany, black with age. It was one of the kind consisting of two square towers, each with a locked door and two compartments within, and a broad, flat connecting-piece with a drawer. In the middle portion stood a noble old punch-bowl, surrounded by glasses—lovely old glasses: the convivial rummer, the useful tumbler, the tall champagne glass, the old-fashioned little port glass, the tiny liqueur glass —a beautiful assortment such as a mere modern cannot understand. On one side of the towers stood a glass filled with spring flowers ; and on the other, as if belonging to the masculine sex, a case for spirits. On the panels above the pictures was a row of plates ; they had stood there for a hundred years, only taken down from time to time to be dusted. On the other side of the room, opposite to the door, was a cottage piano, open, with music piled on the top. In one corner, near the fireplace, was a little stack of churchwarden pipes ; and in the other corner was a door, half open, which revealed a surprising cupboard. The eighteenth-century housewife demanded so many store-rooms for all her jams, jellies, pickles, wines, cordials, and strong waters ; so many still-rooms, linen-rooms, and pantries for the immense collections which her family wanted for the successful conduct of a household, that it became necessary to have a cupboard in the parlour, or general living-room, as well. This cupboard belonged to the Burnikels of the last century ; but its use was continued by the present occupants. Here were kept the cups and saucers, old and new ; here was the plate-basket, containing the forks and spoons in daily use—silver, not plated, and thin with age ; here were certain books of devotion which once formed the family library—they were those referred to by Robert ; here were tea-caddy, coffee-caddy, and sugar-basin ; here were the decanters which belonged to the Sunday dinner ; here were household account books ; here was the corkscrew ; here were mysterious phials ; here were kept the marking ink, the writing ink, the pens and paper ; here was the current pot of jam ; here were the lemons ; here, in short, the thousand and one things likely to be wanted every day by the household. For this room was the family keeping or living room; it was not the dining-room or the breakfast-room: it was the parlour. Robert's room had been the best parlour until he changed it into the study.

One did not take in all these details at once; but I had abundant opportunities afterwards of noting everything. Meantime, what I observed first of all was that 'tea' meant sitting down to a table covered with a white cloth, spread with a magnificent display of good things. I remembered my cousin's ominous words: 'I told them that you might come in to tea.' 'They' had provided this square meal in hospitality for me.

The girl who sat behind the tea-tray, ready to serve, was doubtless the housekeeper, accountant, secretary, clerk, whom my cousin was some day going to marry. A slight, delicate-looking girl she appeared to be; and she seemed shy, her head drooping. Beside her stood, supported by a stick, an elderly man.

'This is Captain Dering,' said my cousin, introducing his friend, 'and this is Isabel Dering.'

The girl bowed stiffly. The Captain extended a friendly hand.

'Glad to make your acquaintance, sir,' he said heartily. 'There was a time when I made new friends every voyage, but those times are over. The sight of a stranger at Wapping is a rare event, I assure you.'

'Especially,' I said, 'a stranger who comes in search of a long-lost cousin.'

The face and dress and general appearance of this old gentleman indicated his profession. It was nautical.

'My tough old figure-head,' they all cried aloud together, 'tells you that I am a sailor, though retired.

My clear, honest eyes tell you that I am a sailor. My red and weather-beaten cheek; my blue cloth; the shape of my jacket—all proclaim that I am a sailor—and proud of it, sir, proud of it.'

Then Robert Burnikel, to my confusion, because I thought the custom, over a cup of tea, long exploded, pronounced a grace. It was an old family grace, dating from the time when all respectable families of the middle class were extremely religious, and the Church of England was evangelical, and when ladies conversed and wrote letters to each other, almost entirely on the condition of their souls. Quite a long collect, this grace was. Yet the utterance was as purely formal as that of grace in a College Hall, or grace in a workhouse, which is the most formal thing I know. Robert pronounced that grace mechanically.

This form of prayer concluded, we all sat down. A tremendous tea was on the table: ham in slices, boiled eggs, potted tongue, prawns, bread-and-butter, cakes of many kinds, including plum-cake, seed-cake, Madeira-cake, tea-cake (which is a buttered or bilious variety), short-cake, biscuits, jam, marmalade, and honey. A hospitable tea. A square tea, in fact. A tea, like Robert Burnikel himself, at once serious and earnest and heavy.

As a rule, I repeat, I take nothing with my afternoon tea. But one must not be churlish. My cousin glanced at me before the prayer, as if to say, 'You shall see for yourself how Wapping can do it.' And I was expected to do justice to all these good things provided in my honour. Why, if this splendid spread was put on the table every day, the Captain's clear eye would become yellow, and the Master would find it no longer possible to follow out an argument, for the black spots, lines, and circles which would be bobbing about between his nose and the printed page. It must have been an exceptional spread. No one could live through a month of such teas. I avoided the ham, and escaped the eggs, and declined the shrimps. But I went in for the cakes, and on the whole acquitted myself, I believe, creditably. The Captain and the giver of the feast, on their parts, ploughed their way resolutely through the whole array of dishes. When the first pangs were appeased, the Captain spoke.

'Sir George Burnikel,' he said, with solemnity, 'I commanded the *Maid of Athens*, which ran between Calicut and Ceylon, for many years. As the captain of that noble vessel I've taken passengers abroad of the highest rank—the very highest—not to speak of coffee-planters. Not that their rank made them better sailors. I acknowledge so much. But it made me a respecter of the British aristocracy, Sir George Burnikel, of which you are a worthy member. Robert here is all for pulling down. Why? I ask you humbly, Sir George—why?'

Robert grunted.

'Why? I ask. When you break up an old ship she's gone. Don't break her up. Let her be. Let her go on till she's wrecked or cast away. No, sir, when you've carried noblemen upon the Indian Ocean, and found out that they are exactly like other people—must be stroked the right way; want the most comfortable berths; drink the same grog, and talk the same language—then you get to respect the aristocracy. Because, you see, with their chances, they might have been so very different. And then you ask, Why pull down? Why sweep away?' He addressed the question to Robert, who only grunted. It was obviously an old subject of dispute.

Then the Captain turned to the table again, and proceeded to work through the festive spread in silence.

The lagging of conversation enabled me to look about and observe. To observe in a strange house is to make discoveries. First, I regarded the girl at the tea-tray. She was rather pretty, I thought; too pale, as if she took too little exercise, or worked too hard, or was underfed; she had curiously soft and limpid eyes—of the kind which seem to hold within them unknown depths of something—wisdom, perhaps; love, perhaps; prophecy, perhaps—according to the lover's interpretation. Her features were regular, but not of classical outline; her cheek looked soft as velvet; her lips were mobile. But she was too grave; she looked sad, even. I remembered what my cousin said: 'No fondling and nonsense.' At twenty-four one has not a large experience, but I certainly could not help thinking that she was a girl designed and intended by Nature to live upon love, and the fondlings and caresses and outward signs of love, which her *fiancé* thought so ridiculous. To have none! To wait for ten, twelve, fifteen years, and to lack that consolation and comfort! Poor child! Poor Isabel!

And then I made another discovery. The girl was afraid of her cousin—the Master—the man who would not permit his own mother to entertain any illusions about the mastery. She was afraid of her own *fiancé;* she watched him anxiously; she anticipated his wants in silence; he received her attentions without acknowledgment. Why was she afraid of him? Did he scold and abuse his secretary?

My host, I perceived, conducted his eating with the resolution and the rapidity that becomes habitual when one sits down to eat and not to talk. As I learned afterwards, there was little conversation at the table in this house, because the master was always full of his own thoughts, and despised the common topics of the day and the season. Perceiving, when he had himself finished a very substantial stop-gap between dinner and supper, that his guest had also ceased taking in provisions, he rose abruptly, pushing back his chair and his plate. One may remark this thing done daily in the cottage and in the village. It is an action which seems to belong to a level lower than that of a master boatbuilder. One might have expected more attention to style; but, as I learned afterwards, in a house where one man rules absolute, like Nero of Rome, and nobody dares to expostulate, some deterioration of manners is apt to creep in.

'Now,' he said, 'if you won't take any more tea-cake? a few shrimps? an egg? No? Then, we'll go and have another talk. Isabel, you needn't come in.'

The Captain took no notice of our departure. I bowed to the girl, who looked a little surprised at this act of courtesy, and rather stiffly inclined her head.

Outside the door Robert Burnikel stopped. 'Upstairs,' he said, 'I think there is something to interest you. Come along.' On the second-floor he threw open the door of a room. 'This,' he said, 'is called the spare-room. But I never remember that it was occupied. We could do without it, I suppose; and we never had any visitors to stay the night. So, you see, it is only half furnished.' The room contained a wooden bed with mattresses, but no feather-bed, or spring-bed, or curtains—only the frame; there were three or four odd chairs standing about, and there was a great sailor's chest. 'This,' he explained, 'is the bed of old John Burnikel, the man who had the bag of diamonds.'

'Oh, it is a pity we haven't got the bag as well, isn't it? Did your great-grandfather buy it?'

'I suspect there was no buying. He was on the spot and he took it—bed and sea-chest and all. I suppose he thought that perhaps, in spite of their failures to find it, the bag might be somewhere about the bed.'

'And he searched, of course?'

'I believe this bed must have been taken to pieces a hundred times. My brother and I once took it to pieces and tapped every piece all over with a hammer to see if it was hollow. Look! Here is the secret cupboard in which people used to hide their things.' It was at the head of the bed. He pressed a certain spot in the woodwork and a door flew open, disclosing a small recess. 'Everybody knew the secret, but everybody pretended not to know. Of course, when the old man was gone, the first thing they did was to look into this secret cupboard. But there was nothing there. Then they turned the house inside out. Then they quarrelled and fought. Then they dissolved partnership.'

'And then,' I added, 'they accused each other, for three generations after, of stealing that bag. It's a wonderful family story. Let me try.'

I put in my hand and felt round the little cupboard. There was nothing.

'And this,' my cousin went on, 'is the old man's sea-chest. That, too, was brought here at the same time as the bed. The two things, except for a table and a chair and a frying-pan, were all the furniture the old man possessed. It's a most marvellous thing to think of. What became of that bag? A hundred times and more that old bed has been pulled to pieces and that old chest has been turned out, to see if there was any hiding-place still undiscovered.'

A large, iron-bound sea-chest. I threw open the lid. It seemed to contain a queer lot of useless rubbish.

'The sight of this box,' said Robert, 'makes one believe that there really must have been a bag of diamonds, after all.'

'Of course there was. The only thing is—what became of it? Nobody knew anything about it. Nobody was in the house from the time that the old man was taken ill until his nephews came; no outsider stole that bag. What became of it, then? Of course, it is no good asking now. Still, it is mysterious!'

'Yes. And about ninety years ago the two cousins were standing over the dead man's bed, just as we are doing now. I feel as if it was yesterday.'

'Don't accuse me,' I said, 'of stealing the thing, or there will be another fight.'

Robert smiled grimly. Were there to be another fight, he was perfectly assured about the event. A very superior young man in every direction. I noted the smile and understood it. But it was all part of the very singular and masterful personality to which I was thus singularly introduced.

By this time I was fully impressed with the fact that I had to deal with a very remarkable, resolute, and ambitious young man, who cared about nothing in the world but his own advancement; strong and able, masterful, self-confident even to the very rare degree of communicating his secret ambitions. Most men, again, limit their ambitions by the circumstances and the conditions of their lives; they do not look much beyond. The ambition of the average working man is to get continuous work; sometimes to become a master; the ambition of the average young shopkeeper is to extend his business; the young solicitor hopes for a steady practice; the young author hopes for acceptance by the editor—only acceptance, only a chance; he has no thought at first of great world-wide success; his ambition increases as he gets on. In Robert's case the ambition was from the outset full-grown. 'I will go into the House,' he said, being only a boat-builder with a small yard and a moderate business, 'and I will become a Cabinet Minister.' Such ambition was immense, presumptuous, audacious, considering his position. And yet, considering the man, apart from his position, I recognised almost from the outset that it was not ridiculous.

CHAPTER VII.

A BARGAIN.

Robert shut the study door carefully, as if to exclude any chance of being overheard. The room was growing dark now, save for the gas-lamp on the opposite side of the street. He pulled down the blind, lit a reading-lamp, which threw a little circle of bright light on the papers of the writing-table, and awakened reflections on the polished walls of cedar, luminous breadths which intensified the shadows between and below. The room felt ghostly. I took a chair outside the circle of light; my cousin took his own chair in his own place within the circle. Then an odd thing happened. Someone in the other room—of course it was Isabel—began to play. She played some soft music, a reverie, a song without words, a romance, a gentle, suggestive kind of music; it acted on me as a mesmeric influence; it is a weakness which always falls upon me when I hear soft music. It falls upon my brain, and I seem to see visions and dream dreams. So while Isabel's fingers rambled over the notes, and her music fell soft and sweet upon the soul, it seemed as if I was only sitting again where I used to sit a long time ago, and that I had just been talking of the recent loss of those jewels with my cousin, whom I suspected of the theft. And I remembered the bedside watching and the death of old John Burnikel, and the search after those diamonds, and the deplorable quarrel with my cousin and the fight that followed. I say that I remembered all this as if I myself was present at these events. Then things got mixed. I had stolen these diamonds myself. By these, and as Judge, second Baronet and third Baronet, I succeeded in gaining more wealth and distinction. But—a very important thing —time was up. My cousin's turn was now to come.

A curious fancy—a whimsical dream. Yet it seized me and it held me. And it kept recurring. Time was up. We had had our turn. Now was the cousin's turn. My money was all gone; my position was gone. His was just about to begin.

'Well,' said the boat-builder, 'I have told you everything—all my ambitions—quite openly and freely. I have trusted you.'

'You have.'

'I trust a man, or I do not, by his face. That is how I engage my men. A fellow comes to me. "Oh," I say, "you're one of a discontented lot; you are a Socialist Anarchist—divide-and-do-nothing sort." I know their faces. Or else I say: "You are a steady workman. You'll do for me." I'm never wrong. I'd take you on to-morrow over the way, with pleasure. That's why I trusted you.'

'All that you have said is in confidence, of course.'

'Isabel doesn't know, except that I mean to go ahead. Well, what you told me before tea is disturbing. All the same, I mean to go into the House as an Independent member. And I know the borough I shall choose. I shall stand for Shadwell, where they know me. As for the money that the election will cost—well, I can't very well afford it, that's certain, but I must plank it down. It will be an investment.'

'Very good.'

'Then tell me, is there anything I have forgotten? I want to stand at the next General Election. I want to begin nursing the borough at once.'

'Perhaps—there may be—one thing,' I replied, with hesitation.

'What thing? I have thought it all out. I can speak. I am not afraid. I can give and take. I know the institutions of the country and their history. I know the questions of the day and the actual facts about them. I've got a memory like a well-ordered cupboard. What have I forgotten?'

'You are not the man I take you for if you are offended.'

'Nonsense, man! You can't offend me.' There are two or three ways of pronouncing the last four words. They may be so emphasized as to convey the highest compliment or the greatest contempt. Robert's way inclined to the latter. He expressed moderate contempt and self-satisfied superiority. A touchy man would have been offended. I am not a touchy man; and I took the reply—compliment or contempt—with a cheerful smile, wasted because unseen in the gloom of the room. I might as well have scowled.

'Well, then, you have forgotten one thing. That is —manners.'

'Manners!' In the bright light of his circle I saw his eyes flash and his cheek flame. It was as if the limit of patience had been reached. 'Manners?' he repeated. 'You mean that I don't know how to behave. I'd have you learn, then, that we behave as well at Wapping as Piccadilly.'

I have since learned that there is no social level where the charge of bad manners would not be resented. It is a beautiful thing to reflect that, however low down one may penetrate, always there is a code of manners, an ideal, a standard, and resentment of the deepest if one is charged with shortcomings in respect to that code. Robert snorted with indignation. For a moment I feared that I had mortally offended him. So I hastened to bring along what the Persian poet calls the Watering-pot of Conciliation.

'One moment. I mean this: You have set before yourself a definite end. Your design is to become a power in the House. You cannot afford, therefore, as you very well understand, to neglect any means of attaining this end. Now, a power in the House must mean in some sense or other a man of Society. Not to know the ways and usages of Society would be the greatest possible hindrance to you. I know of one man now in the House who will never rise, simply because he is a rank social outsider; he can neither dress, nor talk, nor carry himself, like a gentleman. Tell me, for instance, do you possess that simple article, indispensable for society—the common dress-coat?'

'No; I've got an office coat and a house coat and a Sunday coat. What the DEVIL more does a man want?'

'Nothing more, really. But we are artificial. Have you, next, ever been to an evening dinner-party?'

'We dine at one o'clock every day—the good old time. There are no evening dinner-parties here.'

'It is the good old time, no doubt. Still we are, as I said, artificial, and Society dines in the evening. Now, as to a reception or a ball, or anything of that sort——'

'Oh!' Robert groaned. 'What has this kind of thing got to do with me?'

'And as to the common language of Society, and as to such simple matters as the Art and Literature and Drama of the social world——'

'What has all this got to do with the business?'

'A great deal. My ambitious cousin, knowledge of all your subjects will not advance you by yourself. Even oratory will not advance you by itself. You must make yourself a *persona grata;* you must become one of the world; you must dress, talk, act, behave in their way, not in yours. Mind, you must.'

My cousin groaned again.

'For instance, part of manners is the art of suppressing yourself. You must learn how to conceal your aims, or, at least, not to put them forward at the wrong time. You must learn to show a less serious front.'

'Learn to pretend—that's what your fine manners mean.'

'Learn to assume a side of smiles and light talk—and, perhaps, of lighter epigram. You must be able to laugh at things. Do you know that a man who can laugh has ten times greater chance than a man who is always in earnest? You will cultivate, my cousin, if you are wise, the manners, talk, ways, customs, and usages of society, before, not after, you go into the House. Believe me, if you are to rise, as seems likely, you will have to learn these things somehow, and you had better learn them quietly and at leisure before you go in.'

My cousin banged the table with his fist. 'Good Lord!' he cried. 'First you tell me that I must join a party and make myself a slave, and lie, and wriggle, and cringe, and fetch, and carry, and say, and do what I am told. Do you think I would enter the House on such conditions? Never!'

'As you please.'

'And now you tell me, in addition, that I must learn the niminy-piminy, trumpery pretences that you call manners. Well, I won't. You may have your manners, and I will keep mine.'

'Then you will fail. Understand me, cousin. This is not a question of Piccadilly ways. It is one of taking your place with the members as their equal, from the outset. This is of the greatest importance to you. There are many men of your station originally, that is, who have sprung from the trading class, in the House. Some of them entered it with the same ambitions which guide you. Those of them who have got on have all managed to acquire, at the University or elsewhere, the manners of gentlemen. So must you. At present,—I speak freely—your manners are only those of a superior working man. You have lived alone in this corner, and you have forgotten the need of manners. I say that you *must* learn our manners. You must! You must!'

You will observe that I was at this time greatly struck with the man's ability as well as his courage. A smaller man one would have suffered to make his way as he could, sink or swim, probably the former, from sheer ignorance of manners. But this man conquered me. I had never before met with any man who knew so much and spoke so well, and at the same time had such an excellent opinion of himself. Conceit and vanity we have with us always; they are given by kindly Providence to make up for incompetence. But that an able man should be so avowedly self-reliant is rare. I thought that the man himself justified my plain speaking.

He was staggered. 'You can't make me a lardy-dardy fine gentleman,' he objected weakly.

'There is no such thing nowadays. The young fellows are all athletes. I don't want to make you a man of fashion or a man about town. Nothing of the sort. I want to make you a well-bred, quiet man, able to hold your own. You are built for the part; you look the part; I want to put you on a glove of velvet to hide your wrist of iron. Do you understand that?'

The prospect of hiding his wrist of iron pleased the man who desired strength above all things. The use of the velvet, and how this choice fabric lends itself to ambitious purposes, he did not, as yet, understand.

'Well,' he said unwillingly. 'You may be right. Perhaps there is something in it. But if there is, I am too old to learn. Manners can't be taught. There was no school for manners.'

I got up. 'Before I go, Cousin Robert, I have something to tell you. All the confidences shall not be yours.'

'Something to tell me?' Robert looked up, but there was a discouraging want of interest in his eye, and an intimation, conveyed by his manner, that he was thinking about himself, and was not at all interested in my confidences.

'It is not a very long confidence. Not a tenth part so long as yours.'

'That's good,' said my cousin. 'Cut along.'

'Well, it is only this. You called upon me, you have talked to me, in the belief that I am rich.'

'A quarter of a million of money the Judge left behind him.'

'He did. But it is all gone. My father was unfortunate in certain transactions. He lost it all. I only found it out—found out, that is, the whole truth—yesterday, the day you called upon me.'

'What! Lost your fortune? What are you going to do now?'

'That I don't know yet. Perhaps you may be able to help me. On the other hand, I may be able to help you.'

'Have you got nothing?'

'Two or three thousand only.'

'Oh, he calls three thousand nothing! If I had as much! Well, what would you like to do best?'

'Frankly, I don't know. I have learned nothing except the use of a lathe and carpentering tools.'

'You ought to be a boat-builder by rights.'

'I believe I ought. Well, Robert—I may call you by your Christian name—you shall put me on to something or other. And as for me, I can introduce you at least to some pleasant people.'

'I want useful people.'

'They may be useful as well. You shall help me, and I will help you. Is that a bargain?'

Robert hesitated. Every business man looks upon a bargain from all points of view, and especially to see how it will benefit himself. He made up his mind, apparently, that the bargain was in his favour, for he stretched out his arm. 'Hands upon it, cousin.'

At that moment—it was a happy omen—Isabel's music burst into a glad triumphal march.

Then I wished him good-night. 'We will talk further upon the point of manners,' I said; 'perhaps something may be done; meantime, don't take any steps yourself.'

'If I was to buy "The Etiquette of the Ballroom" now?' he suggested anxiously; 'there's one in a shop window at Poplar.'

'My dear fellow, you want no guide but your own experience, and that you must get somehow. Let me think a bit.'

So we parted, and I went home, thinking of nothing but this most remarkable person. Surely it would not be difficult to give him just that little knowledge of society which would prevent him from being *gauche* and ill at ease. Could I not myself take him in hand? I had all the time there is, and one cannot be thinking about one's own future arrangements all day long. Suppose — suppose — suppose. And at this moment—I remember well the exact moment; it was striking nine o'clock in the club smoking-room—an inspiration fell upon me. Other people, including Frances, have called it a moment of madness, demoniac possession, the extremity of folly; but for my own part I call it an inspiration. Every such suggestion, just as every dream, may be traced to some external event. This suggestion, I am sure, was due to my having seen the old wooden bed and the sailor's chest. That made me realize the boat-building ancestors; that gave me the strange feeling of having enjoyed the diamonds for long enough, so that it was now my cousin's turn, and this suggested what I call an inspiration. It fell in with the new necessity for making a livelihood, with the disgust which I entertained for all the methods already proposed. I gave the thing consideration; went to bed with it; wrestled with it; got up with it; got into the bath with it; dressed with it; breakfasted with it. After breakfast I sat down for what they call calm reflection. This was the inspiration. Why should I not become a boat-builder? An honest craft is better than the tricks and wrigglings necessary in any other line of life that appeared open to me. You have seen what they were. If you think of it, the only possible way for a penniless man without a profession to get on and make money or keep himself must be a way of wriggling. I should in this way learn a trade and make myself a craftsman—a Master Craftsman, like my cousin. As for any indignity in learning a trade, I never felt any, and I am not going to allow at this time of day that there is any. Quite the contrary. If every lad learned a trade, a good many would be saved from going into the wrong line. I revolved the thing in my mind all that morning. Then I took paper and pen, and, like Robinson Crusoe, set things out plainly, pro and con. As, for instance, only to put down a few of the pros and cons.

Pro: I had lost my fortune and must change my mode of living altogether.

Con: But there was no need for me to give up my social position.

Pro: I had still enough left to start life in some trade or craft.

Con: But I knew no trade.

Pro: I had a special aptitude for cutting, and carving, and shaping, and making.

Con: But I should lose caste by going into trade.

Pro: But what if I did? You cannot keep caste without money.

And so on, with a special leaning to the pros, because my mind was already made up. I would be a boat-builder.

So at last I sat down and wrote two letters — the first to my cousin Robert, and the second to Frances.

This was the first—the important epoch-making letter:

'My dear Cousin,

'I have been turning over in my mind the difficulty in which we were stuck when I left you yesterday, and I have a curious proposal to make to you. It is this: You shall take me into your yard and teach me the trade or craft of boat-building—all about it: making, selling, wages, prices, materials, everything. Perhaps in twelve months or so I may be master of the subject. You will do this for nothing.

'I, for my part, after the day's work, will take you home with me—to my chambers. And for five nights out of the week I will arrange something or other that will give you that kind of experience of which we spoke.

'If this arrangement pleases you, send me a telegram.'

I despatched this missive by postal messenger, and before noon received the reply: 'Yes; come to-morrow.'

My other note was to Frances—a diplomatic note. I thought it better for the time to avoid her. Perhaps one knew beforehand the views—somewhat narrow and even prejudiced—which she would take about the craft of building boats.

'My dear Frances,' I said,

'You will be interested in hearing that I have decided on my future career. It will lack public splendour, and it will be wholly without distinction.

So far you will not approve of it. Since, however, you know how deplorably free from ambition I am, you will not be disappointed. As soon as I have settled down in my new work I will call upon you and report progress; that is, if you will receive a man who will not any longer call himself a gentleman, but a craftsman.

'Always, my dear Frances,
'Yours affectionately,
'G. B.'

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE YARD.

THAT was how it began. We entered upon this exchange without understanding what was to follow—who ever understands what is to follow? If we were to understand what is to follow, nobody would do anything, because whatever follows is sure to contain the drop of bitterness, or incompleteness, or the unlooked-for evil that goes with everything. We were, in fact, without knowing it, preparing for an exchange. As you shall see, the bargain meant that Robert was to take my place, and I was to take his. But as yet, I say, we suspected nothing of this.

In the morning I presented myself in the guise of a working man; that is to say, I put on a fishing costume of tweeds. Perhaps, as a working man, I ought not to have taken a hansom; but, of course, one is not correct all at once in every detail.

Robert came out of the box he called an office.

'Humph!' he said doubtfully, 'didn't expect you; thought you'd think better of it.'

'I have thought better of it—much better of it.'

He considered a little. ‘If you really mean business,’ he said. ‘Of course you can't learn the thing in twelve months. I was apprenticed for seven years. Still, if you are sharp and handy, and have got the courage to stick at it, you can learn a good bit in that time. Well, and about that—that other proposal.’ He looked round, as if afraid that his men would hear. Why, if anybody knew that he—he, the Master—was going to the West End to learn manners, the laughter and the scorn of it would be inextinguishable.

‘That stands, too,’ I replied.

He laughed and called his foreman, and we had a little serious conversation.

The amateur who stands at a lathe can knock off when he likes; if his fingers get tired he rests; he takes a cigarette; he sits down for a bit; he goes on again when he feels like going on again. The working man, on the other hand, cannot knock off; he must go on; he learns very early the lesson that he must not get tired—or if he does get tired that he must work on all the same; if he gets hot he must go on getting hotter. All this he learns as a boy, and I should think it must take half his apprenticeship to learn it.

‘How do you like it?’ Robert asked grimly an hour afterwards.

I confess that I was enduring acute pains in the right arm, heavy pains in the left arm, dull pains in both legs, and grievous pains in the back; that my brow was like that of the village blacksmith at his best, and that I went on doggedly only because the other fellows, my companions, my brother chips, were going on steadily, as if there was no such thing as bodily suffering.

‘It isn't quite like a fancy lathe, is it?’

I straightened myself painfully, and laid down the tool.

'You'll get tired of it in a day.'

'I shall not allow myself to get tired of it. Let me learn how to build a boat.'

'Have your own way. If you do stick to the work, I shall think all the better of you. No one knows how to take you, with your light touch-and-go talk, as if all the world was made to be laughed at.'

'I now understand that only a very small proportion of the world is permitted to laugh. Henceforth I am as serious as'—I looked round the yard—'as serious as your workmen.' They did look serious, perhaps on account of the artistic responsibility of their craft. 'In plain words, my cousin, don't let us talk of any lack of seriousness. I am next door to a pauper, and I am going to be a builder of boats—Burnikel boats—like my great-grandfather.'

'You shall try, then. I will teach you all I can. But sit down a bit; there's no need to break your back over the job. There's other things in the trade besides the actual work. This isn't a bad trade as things go; but no trade is altogether what the parsons call Christian, and that's what you will have to learn.'

'Must there be tricks in everything?'

'Well, money-making means besting your neighbour. Of course you know nothing about the way in which money is made. You think it just grows.'

'So it does, if you let it alone. It grows luxuriantly. If you spend it, of course it can't grow.'

'But you've got to make it first. There's a great fight—a deadly fight—always going on between us all. The masters want to starve the men; the men want to choke the masters; the buyers and the sellers cheat and lie, and coax and wheedle, all the time. You'll have to join in that struggle, and, mind, it goes on for ever. There never will be any end to this fight; it's the everlasting struggle for existence. There are five millions in this big place—one million of grown men. All but a mere handful are in the fight. Not that many are of much account.'

'I believe I can fight as well as most. At all events, I shall try.'

'It's a kind of fight that you've never learned; that's what I mean, and you won't like it. First of all, you've got to put your pride in your pocket. Do you understand what that means? You've got to be civil to men that you'd like to kick. What do you think of that?'

'That's nothing at all—common politeness. I am every day civil to men whom I ardently desire to kick.'

'You think that all you have to do is to make good boats. Man, you've got to use your shoulders and to push and shove in order even to keep your connection together. How will you like that?'

'It's much the same higher up. No one can escape the common lot. I shall try to push forward. My shoulders, you may observe, are nearly as broad as your own.'

'Then you've got to fight for your prices, to seem yielding, and to fight hard, and to be hail-fellow-well-met with every man that may want to buy a boat; vermin, some of them—vermin and creeping and crawling things. Friendly with them. How will you like that?'

'One is bound everywhere to politeness with the man of the moment. We all do it.'

'You've got to best your man, or he'll best you. How will you like that?'

'Besting your neighbour may be conducted so as to become an intellectual game.'

'And you must call it good business, not over-reaching, when you succeed.'

'My cousin, you fill me with enthusiasm. Let us go on.'

'Go on, then, and good luck to you!'

Thus was the apprentice placed in the hands of the foreman, and practical instruction was commenced. Like Czar Peter at Deptford, which was just across the river, I began to work with my own hands. Well, I had in me, to begin with, the makings of a good workman: hand and eye, and the command of tools, which go with the good workman.

At half-past twelve we knocked off for dinner. Quite ready I was to knock off. I walked across the street with my cousin and joined in the early dinner, which was served at one. We had, I remember, stalled ox and humming ale, and a ginger pudding.

'Going to learn how to build a boat, are you?' said the Captain. 'Ha! you couldn't learn a more useful thing nor a prettier thing. A boat's about the loveliest thing a man can make. Every kind of boat—a man-o'-war's launch or a little up-river cedar and putty skiff—the loveliest thing it is. And what in the world is there more useful? As for you, sir, a Burnikel, even if he is a nobleman, ought to take to boat-building by nature.'

'I am taking to it by nature, Captain. I feel as if I have already learned half the business. I shall be Burnikel the Great, or Burnikel the Incomparable, Prince of Boat-builders.'

Robert took his dinner, as he had taken his tea—in silence. It was the custom, I perceived. Isabel carved, at which one marvelled. I observed that she carved well. When she was not carving, she sat at the table, pale and silent, watching Robert, her task-master and her ice-cold lover. She took very little dinner—much less than a girl of her age ought to take. She looked as if she had no other interest in life than just to satisfy her master. As for youth and life and cheerfulness, these things did not appear to exist in the house. Yet Robert was only twenty-six—two years older than myself—and Isabel was not yet twenty-two.

Dinner over, the Captain returned to his own den at the back, whence presently proceeded the smell of tobacco. I believe that he also solaced himself after dinner with a glass of something warm with a slice of lemon in it. Robert, observing that he always went over the way at two, retired into his study. He was one of those unfortunate men who never waste their time. We all know the kind; they use up every odd ten minutes. Robert worked from dinner, which was over about twenty minutes past one, till two every day. Most men waste the hour after dinner. To Robert it meant simply two hundred hours, or about twenty-five days, at eight hours a day, every year. Such industry is too much for the average man. For my own part, I like to think of stealing twenty-five days for pleasure and laziness, rather than of adding twenty-five to the tale of working days—already too many.

Isabel, as soon as the cloth was cleared, spread out her account-books and began to work.

'Is it good,' I said, 'to work directly after dinner?'

'I do not know. Robert always works after dinner.' I observed that she had a very sweet voice, soft and musical.

'Robert is a strong man. You are not a strong man. May I use the privilege of a cousin—you are to be my cousin some time—to point out to you that many things which Robert may do with impunity you must not even attempt to do?'

'The work has got to be done, and I cannot ask whether this time or that time is best.'

'Why not play a little after dinner.? You play very well.'

'I never play during working hours. Robert would not like it.'

'Then——'

'Please, Sir George, allow me to go on with my work.'

I said no more, but stood at the window and watched her. She had a head of comely shape, and her features were good; but why so sad? why so pale? why so silent?

Presently I went back to more aching shoulders and tired wrists, envying the workmen, who never wanted to straighten their backs, and whose wrists seemed made of iron. That is the way with all manual work. The artist works away with his colours; all day long his hand is in his work—his wonderful work. But his fingers and his wrist never get tired. The navvy goes on digging away, with rounded back and unwearied arms, as if there was no exertion required for his work, and no weight in a shovel full of clay. Our men worked on as if there was no weariness possible with a plane or a hammer. But the amateur leaves off and sits down, and has a whiff of tobacco, and a drink, and a talk for half an hour or so before he goes on again. And this is the real reason why amateur work is never so good as professional work is, that the amateur can leave off when he feels fatigued, while the professional must keep on.

The foreman stood over me. 'You're handy with the tools,' he said.

In fact, he had nothing to teach me in that way. What I had to learn was not the execution of the work, but the design of the work; that first, and the other part—the trading part—afterwards.

I worked like the rest—without a coat and with sleeves turned up; but I deny the apron. In the last century every working man wore an apron, and every serving-man in a shop wore an apron. Now we have left off that badge of trade or servitude. On the whole, I think that I am glad that I never wore an apron. I kept my working clothes in the house, and changed them in the morning and for dinner; and I declare that, as I grew to understand how a boat was built, how her lines were laid down, how her skeleton was put together, how her ribs were clothed, and how she was finished and fitted, a noble enthusiasm—the family enthusiasm—seized upon me, and I felt that true happiness lay not in ambition, which in Robert's case I regarded with pity; not in wealth, taking my own case as an example; but in the building of boats.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE EVENING.

In the evening the other part of the bargain began.

'My turn now,' I said. 'If I can only get this aching out of my shoulders. I am now going to be your coach —a judicious coach. The first point I am told that a judicious coach observes is never to teach more than is wanted. And the next thing is to rub in what he does teach—to rub it in by incessant repetition.'

'It will be labour thrown away,' he grumbled. 'You will never make a fine gentleman of me.'

'My dear cousin, I am not going to try. I am, however, going to make of you a man acquainted with, and accustomed to, the usages of society. You are to belong to the world of society, not of fashion. The House of Commons has still a large majority of men who belong to that world. A knowledge of these habits, I have already told you, is absolutely indispensable.'

'Oh! Very good, then, I am ready.' But he was not eager; he was rather glum about the work in hand.

'Yes, but you must be more than ready. You must be as eager to learn this branch of knowledge as any other. Don't grumble over it—like an unwilling schoolboy.'

'Look here, Sir George——'

'Don't call me Sir George, to begin with. You are my cousin. Call me George, and I shall call you Robert.'

'Very well. I confess I don't like it. How would you like to be told that you don't know manners? Hang it! the thing sticks——'

'Let us say, then, the manners of the West End. Don't let it stick, old man. Now listen. First of all you must have dress clothes, and you must put them on every evening.'

'What the devil does a man want with dress clothes?'

'I will tell you when I have time. Meanwhile, you must have them. The next thing is that, from the moment you leave Wapping till you get home again, you are not to speak one word concerning your projects, or your ambitions, or your opinions.'

'I don't mind that condition. No one but yourself does know my ambitions.'

'Very well, then, that's settled so far. Now let us sit down and consider my scheme.' We had reached my chambers, and we were in the study where the lathe was. 'I have been making out a little skeleton scheme—in my head.'

'Let us hear it.' We sat down solemnly opposite each other to discuss this question seriously.

'What do we want? To make you a man of the world. Some things you won't want to learn—whist, billiards, lawn tennis, dancing——'

'No,' he grinned, 'not billiards or dancing—or betting or gambling.'

'The first thing, the most important thing, is to get the dinner arrangements right. With this view we will begin with a course of restaurants. I don't say that one meets with the very finest manners possible at a restaurant, but, still, the people who go there have at least got a veneer; they understand the elements. I need not tell you much. You will look about you and observe things, and compare and teach yourself.'

'Well? We are to waste time and money over a needless and expensive late dinner, are we? And all because there's a way of holding a fork.'

'It is part of the programme. After a while I shall take you to the theatre, which is sometimes a very good school of manners, and there you will see on and off the stage ladies in their evening splendour.'

'Jezebels—painted Jezebels.'

'Not all of them. A few, perhaps, here and there.

Later on you will be able to distinguish Jezebel. But it is best not to think about this lady. Remember that a well-dressed woman has never come within your experience, and it is time for you to make her acquaintance. After a week or two of restaurants I will take you to a club, and introduce you to some of our fellows. You can sit quiet at first and listen. Their talk is not exactly intellectual, but it shows a way of looking at things.'

'I know. Like you talk. Just as if nothing mattered, and everything was all right and as it should be.'

'Not dogmatic nor downright. Not as if we were going to fight to the death for our opinions.'

'If the opinion is worth having, it is worth defending. You ought to fight for it.'

'My dear cousin, formerly opinions were distinct and clearly outlined. Nowadays there is so much to be said on the other side that all opinions have grown hazy and blurred. For instance, you want, perhaps, to pull down the House of Lords.'

'No, I don't. I want to reform the House.'

'Well, if you did you would be astonished to learn what a lot can be said for the Peers, and how extremely dangerous it would be to pull down their House, because the House of Commons leans against it, and all the houses in the country lean upon the House of Commons. When you have grasped that fact, where is the clearness of your opinion? Gone, sir—gone.'

'You think that you will change me completely, then.'

'Not quite completely. Only in certain points. I shall try to graft upon you the manner of a finished gentleman. No one could possibly look the part better.

You might be an Earl to look at. Of course, the garb will have to be reconsidered—those boots, for instance.' Robert looked quickly at mine as compared with his own, and blushed. He blushed at his own boots. This was a note of progress. 'But all in good time. You shall not present yourself in a drawing-room until you can enter it, and stand in it, and talk in it, as if you belonged to the world of drawing-rooms.'

Robert entered upon his part of his education with much the same enthusiasm as is shown by a dog of intelligence going off to be washed. It has to be done; he knows that; and he goes, but unwillingly. Nobody has any conception of the numberless little points in which Wapping may differ from Piccadilly. Wapping, you see, has so long been cut off from external influences. The influence of the clergy, beneficent in other respects, is not felt at the Wapping dinner-table. And the Burnikels, by the retirement of the other old families, the aristocracy of the quarter, have remained almost the only substantial people of the place. Therefore, for a great many years they lived alone; and their manners, as a natural consequence, continued to be much the same as the manners of their forefathers.

Take, for instance, the ordinary dinner-napkin. It is astonishing to note how many mistakes may be made with a simple dinner-napkin, when a man takes one in hand for the first time. There were no dinner-napkins at Wapping. There had been, many years ago, but they went out when forks came in. That is to say, so far as the children were concerned, just about two hundred years ago. The right handling of the dinner-napkin can only be acquired by custom. So also with wine and wineglasses. If you are perfectly ignorant of wine, except that the black kind is port, and the straw colour means sherry, and that either kind, but especially the former, may be exhibited on Sunday, you become bewildered with the amount of wine lore that one is supposed to know.

'You are getting on,' I remarked, after six weeks of almost heart-breaking work, because—I repeat that one would never believe that isolation could make such a difference—everything had to be learned. This young man was steeped in the things he had learned from books—political economy, history, sociology, philosophy, trade questions, practical questions—he was a most learned person, but of the things of which men talk, or men and women talk, he knew nothing—absolutely nothing. Art, poetry, fiction, the theatre, sport, games, things personal—which take up so large a share in the daily talk—on all these things he was mute. He came to the club with me, and sat perfectly silent; disdainful at first, but presently angry with himself for not being able to take a part, and with the fellows for talking on subjects so trifling.

'I'm a rank outsider,' he said. 'I heard one of them call me a rank outsider. Thought I couldn't hear him. If he'd said it in the street, I'd have laid him in the gutter. A rank outsider. Do you think, George, that you will ever make me anything else?'

'What does it matter if you are a rank outsider in some things? Patience, and let us go on.'

At first he grumbled; he could see no use in trifles, such as ceremonials of society. We have simplified these of late years; still, some forms remain.

'You will want to be received,' I told him, 'as a man of culture. These are the outward and visible forms of culture.'

He listened and reflected. Presently I observed that he took greater interest in things—he was realizing what things meant. Finally, the recognition of things arrived quite suddenly. Then he grumbled no longer. He looked about him, interested and amused. He sat out plays, and talked about the life pictured—a very queer sort of life it is, for the most part. As for the acting, he accepted the finest acting as part of the play, without comment. He was like an intelligent traveller—he wanted to know what it all meant, the complex civilization of this realm; where the Court comes in; what part is played in the daily life by the noble Lords, whose House he was so anxious to improve for them, feeling quite capable of adjusting reforms and bringing the Peers up-to-date by himself alone and unaided; how the Church affects society; what are the powers and the limitations of money; what is the real influence of the Press; what is the position of the professions. He wanted to know everything. As for me, I had never before asked myself any of these questions, being quite satisfied with the little narrow world that surrounded me.

I tried to interest him in Art. It was impossible. He said that he would rather look at a tree than the picture of a tree. I tried him with fiction. He said that the world of reality was a great deal more interesting than the world of imagination. I tried him with poetry. He said that, if a thing had to be said, it was best said plainly, in prose.

He wanted to survey the whole world, and to understand the whole world. When one assumes the attitude of an impartial inquirer, and learns what can be said on the other side, the Radical disappears and the Reformer succeeds. There is, of course, the danger, if one inquires too long, and with more than a certain amount of sympathy, that the Reformer himself may vanish, leaving the Philosopher behind. Or, perhaps, Radical, Reformer and Philosopher may all live together in the same brain.

Robert was passing into the second stage. He snorted at things no longer; he rather walked round them, examined them, and inquired how they came.

'I confess,' he said, 'that I was ignorant when I came here. My knowledge was of books. Men and women I did not take into account. It is worth all the trouble of learning your confounded manners only to have found out the men and women.'

This was the Reformer.

'The people at this end of the town,' he continued, 'are interesting, partly because they have got the best of everything, and partly because they think themselves so important. They are not really important. The people who do nothing can never be important. The only important person is the man who makes and produces.'

Here was the Radical.

'You live in a little corner of the world; you are all living on the labour of others; you are beautifully behaved; you are, generally, I think, amiable; you look so fine and talk so well that we forget that you've no business to exist. It is a pleasure only to watch you. And you take all the luxuries, just as if they naturally belonged to you. I like it, George. I am a rank outsider, but I like it.'

This was the Philosopher.

'And what about the House?'

'Oh! I've begun to nurse my borough. I address the men every Sunday evening in a music-hall. You may come and hear me, if you like.'

'What is your borough?'

'Shadwell, close by, where they know me and the boat-yard. The men come in crowds. Man! There is no doubt! They come, I say, in crowds. They fill the place; and mind you, I can move the people.'

'Good. If you can only move the House as well!'

'These fellows will carry me through. I'm sure of it. They are the pick of the working man—Socialists, half of them—chaps, mind you, with a sense of justice.'

Here we had the Radical still.

'That means getting a larger share for themselves, doesn't it?'

'Sometimes. Motives are mixed. Well, I'm going to be Member for Shadwell—Independent Member. A General Election may at any moment be sprung upon us. And Lord! Lord! if I had gone into the House as I was six weeks ago!'

'Patience, my cousin; we have not quite finished yet. There's one influence wanting yet before you are turned out, rounded off, and finished up. Only one thing wanting, but a big thing. No, I will tell you, later on, what that is.'

CHAPTER X.

THE CHURCHYARD.

I PASS over as irrelevant, or at least superfluous, the very disagreeable interview in which I revealed my plans to Frances. She had found a new opening for me—I was to be appointed Commissioner for Tobago, or President of Turk's Island, or Lieutenant-Governor of the Gold Coast; she could obtain the post for me; it was an excellent opening; I was to spend two or three years in the endeavour to escape fever, and five or six years of sick-leave at intervals. I should then have a clear claim to the gratitude of the Colonial Office, and should be appointed Governor of some colony with a salary of many thousands. What more could any man desire?

Nothing, truly. And, as Frances observed, no creeping; no wriggling; no backstairs; also there is no examination for these appointments. And they are obtained in the good old way, by interest alone.

Why not, then, accept? Because, unfortunately, I was now a craftsman, and I really desired no other kind of life.

It was then that Frances spoke with conviction of demoniac possession—I never before thought she believed in it—and of the extreme madness which sometimes seizes on men; of the follies unspeakable which they commit. She was very angry—very angry indeed. She also declared her disgustful surprise at the bad, low, grovelling taste which made it possible for me to leave the ranks of gentlehood, and to go down—down—down—to live among beery, tobacco-smoking, ill-bred, uncultivated boors and bourgeois. She displayed on this subject quite an unexpected flow of language and command of adjectives. To be sure, I had never seen her in a real rage before. And she looked very handsome indeed, marching about the room with flushed cheeks and angry eyes, while she declaimed and denounced and lamented. I never admired her so much. She became so entirely unexpected that I very nearly fell in love with her.

When she had quite finished by throwing such words as 'insensate,' 'clod,' and 'stock and stone,' at my head, and by saying that she had now done with me for ever; and when she had thrown herself into a chair, and had held her handkerchief to her eyes—I had never seen her cry before, and, indeed, it was so unexpected that I very nearly, as I said before—and when I had said a few brotherly words, and uttered a few assurances—and when we had shaken hands again—I kissed her hand if I remember aright—we sat down opposite to each other, and close together, and had a pleasant talk quite in the old style, though it was understood that I was henceforth only a plain boat-builder.

It was then that I told her first about my cousin. She listened without much interest. The man was a mere tradesman.

'You want a recruit, Frances, for the Party? Of course you do. Well, then, I tell you that you could not do better than look after this man.'

'A man's a man, of course; otherwise, George, the working men members do not always turn out worth much. Still, there are one or two—and—well, tell me more about this man.'

'He is not exactly a working man. He is, like myself, a Master Craftsman.'

'Oh!' She shrugged her shoulders impatiently. Such distinctions she knew not. And then I told her about his attainments, and his boundless ambitions, and everything, till at last I succeeded in making her believe that here really was a man who might be worth considering—the only fault which Frances possessed was that she underrated the powers of everybody outside a certain circle. I told her about Robert at first, I believe, in order to divert her mind from the distressing spectacle of my decline and fall, and next in order to show her that we were not all beery boors and bourgeois at Wapping-on-the-Wall, and, lastly, it came into my head, that if she should peradventure take an interest in his Parliamentary career it might be very useful to him.

After a bit she began to understand a little. Her imagination was at last fired by the picture of this young man resolving, while yet a boy, on entering the House of Commons, and learning to speak at a sham Parliament; working at home on history, politics, social economy, all the questions of the day; reading Mill, Herbert Spencer, Darwin, Huxley, Lecky, Froude, Freeman, Green, and Seeley, and all the rest of them; becoming a learned man; denying himself the joys of youth—all for the sake of his ambition; and all the time remaining strong and masterful as one born to command. Because I am a dull person in narrative, or because she was prejudiced generally against trade, it was a long time before I succeeded in awakening her interest in the man. 'Do you know,' she said at last, 'that you seem to have got a very remarkable creature down there! Of course I cannot really believe that he will ever come to anything. A man living all by himself, and ignorant of all the world outside his trade, cannot come to any good. In the House one must know men, not books only.'

'I wonder if you would like to hear him speak. He speaks every Sunday evening. If you like we will go.'

So it was arranged. Frances would like to see the kind of people who formed that constituency; she would like to hear the kind of speech that pleased them; she would go, subject to one condition, that she was not to see the Boat-Yard. 'I could not, George,' she said. 'It is bad enough that you should descend into that horrid place—when you might become a Colonial Governor. I could not actually see the chips and shavings. Oh, George! you are very wilful—but I must always forgive you. Yes, I will go with you to see this wonderful person of Wapping. You only try to excuse your abominable alacrity in sinking by pretending that you have got a prophet down there.'

So I came away forgiven and reconciled, but for ever fallen in her esteem, and I returned to my riverside work with greater heart now that the worst was over.

It was natural that one should take an interest in the people of the place—especially in those of the house. I spent every day an hour—the dinner-hour—with Robert's household. Sometimes, too, another half-hour over a cup of tea. Therefore, of course, one thought a good deal about the people. The Captain I found an honest, hearty old fellow, who liked his meals, took a cheerful glass after his dinner and supper, and slept away most of the remaining time. He had a room at the back called the Captain's cabin, where there was a narrow bed and an easy-chair; a hob with a kettle; a table with a tobacco-jar and other conveniences. There I sometimes visited him and heard experiences.

But the person of real interest was Isabel. I thought her, at first, inanimate, and perhaps stupid. I discovered, first, that she had a very beautiful head—the poets do not seem to understand the charm of a well-shaped head—but it was nearly always drooping. Then I observed that her hair was quite wonderful—there was such a lot of it, and it was of such a lovely light colour, looking as if it held the sunshine even in that dark 'parlour.' It was, however, only rolled up without any coquettish display—was the girl quite ignorant of her charms? Her eyes were generally down-drooped as in shyness or humility—once she lifted them with some strange wonder because I made some frivolous remark—there was never any frivolity about this house before I went into it. They were large and limpid eyes, of a deep blue, like the dark blue of a pansy. And then I discovered that her features were straight and regular, and that, though her cheek was pale, and her manner was listless and drooping, the girl was full of beauty in face, and head, and figure. And Robert, like a thing of wood, had no eyes for the loveliness that was his by engagement! Wonderful!

I could never get the girl to talk to me. She sat at table, carving in silence, or pouring out the tea in silence. When it was over, she spread out her books and began to work again. And week after week passed by. I was an old shipmate with the Captain; I was on the most confidential terms, as you have seen, with Robert; but Isabel remained a stranger.

Then the opportunity came.

It was a Saturday afternoon. I had been spending an hour after dinner talking with the Captain in his den. Then, as he showed signs of going to sleep, I left him and bent my steps westward. It was a bright, sunny afternoon in May. The street was deserted; the warehouses were shut up; the sunshine increased, but set off, the dreariness of the tall places on either side.

I came to the mouth of the Dock. As once before, the gates were open for the passing of a ship, and I had to wait. I leaned against the rail and watched. On the right was the Dock, with the masts of the ships; on the left was the river. I looked at the river and looked at the Dock. Then I became aware of a most unexpected fact: on the right hand, besides the Dock, there were trees—green trees. 'Anything green in Wapping?' I asked. 'Trees and green leaves! Do they grow out of the water?'

I then perceived that there was a street leading north; I thought that there was nothing north of the High Street except the Dock. I was mistaken. At the corner was a substantial modern house—the vestry house of the parish—with its brass plate and clean windows. Next I observed a lovely eighteenth-century house—sober, square, built of red brick, having an ample portal, and in the wall effigies of boy and girl.

This was the parish school. The figures looked more demure than one could believe possible in human boy and human girl. And then I came to the church, a plain and unaffected preaching-house of brick, with pillars and portico of stone. Beside it, on the south side, was a narrow churchyard, adorned with old tombstones, head-stones, and altar-stones—the sepulchres of bygone captains, past owners, sailors, and boat-builders. I observed with some pride the name of Burnikel on one of them, the nearest to the street—my ancestor. Perhaps all the important tombs belonged to Burnikels, if I could only climb over the rails to see. The church was shut, yet it might have been more useful in the week, when Wapping is full, than on Sunday, when Wapping is empty. Had it been open, I could have gratified my family pride still more by observing the tablets and reading of the incomparable virtues of other Burnikels belonging to this fine old stock. There was part of the churchyard on the north side. Its houses had been recently cleared away, and the space turned into a recreation-ground. So liberal is the County Council that they have swept away half the remnant of Wapping that had been spared by the Docks, and now there are not enough people left in the town to populate the recreation-ground. Children were recreating in it, however, and there was a gymnasium for them in one corner, and a stand for the summer band in another corner. A highly picturesque row of 'backs' revealed the character of the streets that had been cleared away.

I noted these things. I observed also that there were still remaining beyond the recreation-ground other streets of small houses — not beautiful, not clean, perhaps squalid, if one were inclined to harshness—and beyond these streets tall masts, which told of another Dock. Wapping, then, did not, as I had fondly imagined, consist of one street only, with a river on one side and docks on the other, and no living person in it at night except the Burnikels. Wapping is a collection of human beings; it is a hamlet, a township, a town complete. Here was the Parish Church; here were the endowed schools; here was the Vestry Hall; here was the playground. I turned back, and then, which I had passed over before, I perceived before me, fenced round, a peaceful, beautiful burying-ground, lying opposite the Parish Church on the other side of the road. A more peaceful spot one would not expect in the most secluded village. It was filled with tombs and head-stones; it was planted with a thick coppice of limes, lilacs, laburnums, and all kinds of flowering trees and shrubs growing among the tombs. I looked through the bars. Wapping, then, had this one garden left; and since the greater part of Wapping was dead and gone, buried deep below the docks, a churchyard seemed the fittest place in which to possess a garden. Wherever industries spread, and trade increases, we ought to find the past always beside the present. In the midst of the noise and hurry of Manchester there stands the ancient college; in the midst of Hull rises the ancient church; in the midst of the smoke and grime of Newcastle there is its ancient fortress; and beside the modern docks of Wapping stands the old church, with its burying-ground and its schools. Let us never live where there is nothing ancient, nothing to connect us with our forefathers, nothing to remind us of death, nothing to preach to us on the continuous life in which the living are but links, and the past is neither lost nor forgotten.

The gate was unlocked. I gently pushed it open and stepped within, reverently, yet with the sense of ownership. Why not? Before me stood a head-stone—the name had been recently cleaned and restored—'Sacred to the Memory of John Burnikel, Master Mariner, died March 16, 1808, aged ninety-two years.' That must be the man with the diamonds. I stooped down and pushed aside the grass to read the text with which his pious cousins had decorated the tomb. 'Of whom the world was not worthy,' I read. Astonishing! 'Of whom the world was not worthy.' This must have been written while they still expected to find the diamonds. Then I plunged, so to speak, into the recesses of this coppice. And there I found, to my amazement, sitting on a tomb with folded hands and hanging head, in an attitude of the most profound dejection, the girl Isabel.

She lifted her head when she heard my step. She had been crying; the tears, like dewdrops, lay still upon her cheeks.

'You here, Isabel?' I cried. 'What are you doing in the place of tombs?'

'I am sitting here.' But she rose as if she was tired of sitting there, and should now go home.

'Yes, I see. But——'

'It is a pretty place. There are not too many pretty places in Wapping.'

'No. Do you often come here?'

'In spring and summer sometimes, when I can get away—on Saturday afternoons. It is quiet. Nobody else ever comes. I have it all to myself.'

'Why are you crying, Isabel? Don't cry. It makes me miserable to see a girl crying. Are you unhappy?'

She turned away her head, and made no reply.

'Sit down again where you were, Isabel. It is a pretty place. The lilacs are bursting into blossom, and the laburnums are beginning. It is a very pretty place. The dead sleep well, and the living you do not see. Can you tell me, Isabel, why you are unhappy?'

She shook her head, but she obeyed in sitting down again.

'Of course I have seen all along that you are not happy. You work too hard, for one thing. Is it the work?'

'Oh, no, no, no. I must do what Robert tells me to do.'

'You are too much confined to the house. Is it the want of change?'

'No, no; I want no change. I do what I have to do.'

'You will not tell me?'

'I cannot.'

'Of course, I have no right to ask. Still, I am Robert's cousin, and I see you every day, and you can't wonder if I take an interest in you. Will you be offended if I speak just a little of my mind?'

'I offended? Does that matter?' A strange thing for a girl to say, as if she was of no importance at all—as if surprised that anyone should regard her at all.

'Well, Isabel, in that part of the world where I have chiefly lived the girls are treated with consideration. They are princesses; they are filled with the consciousness of their own power; their words are received with respect, and their wishes are studied. It matters very much indeed whether one offends them or not. So I hope not to offend your ladyship.'

'You will not offend me.'

'Well, then, you work too hard; you get no society; you have no change; you take too little exercise; you are growing nervous and shy; you shrink from seeing people.'

'I live the life that is assigned to me.'

'You are so young, Isabel, that you ought to sing in the house; you ought to walk as if you had wings; you ought to laugh all day; you ought to rebel, and revolt, and mutiny——'

She did laugh, but not with merriment.

'All these things belong to your age, and your sex, and—your beauty.'

'My beauty!' she repeated, with a kind of wonder—'my beauty! Oh no; you must not talk nonsense.'

'Your beauty. You should be a very beautiful girl if the cloud would lift. Come, now; may I lift that cloud for you? May I try, at least?'

I held out my hand. She hesitated a moment. Then she gave me her own timidly.

I did not suspect the real cause of her unhappiness. I did, however, feel a most profound pity for a young girl who could find no better amusement than to sit among the tombs on a fine afternoon in spring. Even those who are nearing the time when they will be put to lie there do not generally like to sit among them.

'You will tell me some other time,' I said, 'why you are so sad. Meantime, let me be your friend; and look here, Isabel: I am a great physician. You must believe that I have cured countless cases of Languishing Lady and Doleful Damsel. I am thousands of years old, although I am apparently only five-and-twenty; that is because I am such a great physician.' Well, at this nonsense she actually smiled. 'And now I will prescribe for you: Not so much work; not so much house; not so much monotony.'

'The work has to be done.'

'Robert is so busy himself that he does not observe. I shall speak to him.'

'Oh, but what he says——'

'Yes, yes, I know. I will speak to him. Now come with me. I will take you out upon the river. That will do you more good than sitting among the tombs—even the tombs of the Burnikels.'

There are still boats and 'first oars' at Wapping Old Stairs. In five minutes I was sitting beside her in the stern of a wherry—Burnikel-built—with a couple of stout fellows pulling us down-stream. And I brought her back with colour in her cheeks and brightness in her eyes. 'My medicine works already,' I said. 'Robert will say that I have done wonders.'

Alas! Robert observed no change at all; and during the half-hour of tea the poor girl sat as usual with hanging head and down-dropped eyes. But it was a beginning.

CHAPTER XI.

AN ADDRESS.

ON Saturday evening I called for Frances. We were going to hear the man she would call the Wonderful Person of Wapping.

'We shall have to drive right through London,' I told her. 'You will see first the trade end of the West; then the lane of the country visitors, called the Strand; then the lane of the printers; then the merchants' quarters, silent and deserted; and then the place where the people live who do all the work; the city of the thousand industries. And then you will see these people you are going forth to see.'

'So long as you don't take me to see the places with associations, I don't mind. I was looking over a book about London the other day; it was full of associations. Dear me! What does it matter to me where Milton lived? And why should I want to see the place where Shakspere had a theatre?'

'You are curiously impatient about the past, Frances.'

'I like the world just exactly as it is, George; the order of it and the ways of it; and the flow of the stream—I like to feel that I am in the swim. And if ever I marry again, I shall be a great deal more in the swim.'

'The man you will hear to-night likes the world as it ought to be.'

'Well, why not? So long as we don't change anything. Now, Master Craftsman, my gloves are on.'

'You look very fine to-night, Frances. It will please our friends at Shadwell, seeing a lady among them, that she is a real lady. They resemble your friends in one respect—these men of the gutter, as you kindly called them on a recent occasion—they like to see a woman well dressed.'

It is a long drive from Piccadilly to High Street, Shadwell, which, as everybody knows, is a continuation of Ratcliffe Highway. The whole journey was as unknown to Lady Frances as China or Peru. For the City she cared nothing; memories of Gresham and Whittington moved her not; this evening, of course, the offices and warehouses were closed, and the streets deserted; she only began to take interest when we came out on Tower Hill, and drove past the gray old fortress into the highway sacred to the memory of sailors and to riverside thieves and to crimps, and to Moll and Poll and Doll. Indeed, ghosts of the departed sinners are still allowed regretfully to hover around the swinging doors of these old taverns, and to linger about the pavement where they were wont to roll and sing and dance and fight. Oh, the brave old days! And they acknowledge that the game is still kept up, and with spirit, though, perhaps, with less heart in it than of old. The fighting has gone off sadly; the singing is still good, but that, too, shows signs of deterioration; the dancing, however, shows the old spirit—legs are loose, heel and toe are true to time; and the drinking is still free and generous. As for Moll and her friends, they continue to lend the charm of woman's society to Mercantile Jack.

'Men and women!' said Lady Frances. 'And by their appearance not among the strictest moralists. Show me men and women, George, and not tall black warehouses, where something once stood, or grimy churches, where something once happened. Give me men and women. Give me the present. Ouf! what a reek from that door!'

The carriage stopped for a moment; a little crowd assembled, seeing that most unaccustomed appearance, a carriage and pair with a coachman and a footman in liveries. The open door belonged to a tavern full of sailors drinking and smoking, so that the air which came forth in waves was charged with the fragrance of rum, gin, beer and tobacco. The carriage moved on slowly.

There came another kind of fragrance. The first knocked one down like a club, the second cut one like a knife.

'It is fried fish,' I explained. 'This is the staple food of the women and work-girls. There are differences in the matter of food. For my own part I should never get over a prejudice against this form of—— Do get on a little faster, if you can,' I called to the coachman.

We passed into another street, really the same, but called by a different name, where there were no sailors and no sailors' friends. It was, however, filled with people walking about; among them were lads smoking cigarettes, girls with immense yellow feathers in their hats and bright blue blouses, walking arm-in-arm, laughing loudly; working men leaning about with pipes, women with children in arms, children everywhere tumbling about the road and the gutter.

'Behold the people!' I said. 'Concentrated people. Pure extract of people.'

'I recognise them,' said Frances, 'though I do not seem to have seen them before. On the whole they look harmless.'

'As for their power of harm, I have my own opinion. But it is quite certain that at present they don't want to do any harm.'

'It is curious to think that all of us have come out of this mass. Here and there, I suppose, one disengages himself and leaves his friends, and gets up a bit over their heads, and prepares the way for founding a family. That is the way we all began, perhaps. The Earls and Barons of the future have got their fathers and mothers in this crowd. But no one, except you, George, ever wanted to go back again. Oh! most remarkable of men! Unique Man! You wanted to go back again.'

The carriage stopped at the entrance of a hall; gas-lights flamed over the open doors; people, nearly all men, were streaming in, and in the lobby men were standing about disputing and arguing in earnest tones; everyone looked as if he came on private business—which was the first thing remarkable.

I spoke to an attendant doorkeeper, who conducted us upstairs and along the back of the gallery to a private box overlooking the stage. Lady Frances looked round. By the decorations, the footlights, the stage, the place for the orchestra, the gallery which ran all round the room, the large room itself, and the close atmosphere, it was evident that the place was habitually used for entertainments.

'This is the Siren Music-hall,' I explained. 'It is named, not after the Sisters Three, of whom the proprietor and baptizer never heard, but after the new-fashioned steam-whistle which you may hear all day long upon the river. And it is hired for these meetings.'

'They are not going to have, I hope, a music-hall entertainment?'

'Not quite. You are going to hear a political speech. Meantime, look round and watch the people. You say you want men and women. Very well. There are your men and women all gathered together, especially the men.'

They were nearly all men—working men. Frances looked down upon the crowded hall; the faces she gazed upon shone white and shiny in the glare of the gas; they were serious faces, they were hard faces; the impression produced by the collective face was one of honesty and slow powers of perception, but with determination. Most of them sat in silence, leaning back contentedly, and in no hurry. The men who work actively with the bodily limbs all day for their wage are never in a hurry so long as they can wait sitting. When they talked it was seriously and with earnestness, conducting their argument on the approved lines, in which one man advances an array of alleged facts which he cannot prove, and the other contradicts the allegations, though he cannot disprove them. This is the argument of the taproom, the bar-parlour, and the smoking-room. The more carefully we adhere to the old-fashioned, well-tried method, the more animated, spirited, and convincing is the conversation. Imperfect knowledge is most clearly indicated by frequent interruptions and noisy denials. Now, these men were arguing on the constitution of the country, being ignorant of what it is, how it has grown, whence it came, or what it means. And they wanted to change it, being ignorant of what these changes would mean, or how they were to be effected, and how other members of the community would receive them. There were Socialists among them, men who look forward to the time when every man, for the sake of every other man, and not for himself at all, will gladly do a hard day's work and get no payment or profit but only the equal ration, the same garb, the same warmth, and the same roof; and they think that the levelling up or down to the same unbroken plane will create, for the first time in history, happiness complete. 'When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?' Alas! it is the same old, old story. There was then no gentleman, but in the third or fourth generation after Adam there was founded the first family of gentlefolk—they were, I believe, Welsh. There were also in the crowd Anarchists—a kindly race who want to sweep away all laws, with the police and the lawyers, and the judges and the prisons, and to leave everybody to work out his own redemption for himself. And there was among them the common Radical who desires nothing more than the abolition of the Crown, the Church, and the Lords, after which no one certainly can expect or desire anything more. And there were many of that numerous class, the Wobblers, who incline this way and that, being unable to balance the advantages of any one plan against any other. Mostly, however, being poor and dependent, they desire change. Some of the women came with their husbands and brought their work with them, the business of the evening being quite below their own attention. The British matron, who is a practical and keen-eyed person, is seldom able to understand that the abolition of the House of Lords will give her husband better pay, or herself more housekeeping money. Here and there one saw a white woman's face, with set lips and furrowed brow. She was that rare woman who can see the wickedness of things, and the imperfection of things, and the injustice and cruelty and uncertainty of things; and she ceases to believe in the powers that be, or in the doctrines of Church, of teacher, and of preacher, and longs to shuffle the cards and try a new deal, if haply that may bring a remedy to the evils of the time.

Lady Frances looked down upon this crowd watching and wondering, interested merely by the sight of the lines of faces below her, line behind line, row behind row; while I told her the things that are written down above.

'I am glad I came,' she murmured. 'Oh! I am very glad I came. George, I like to see them. Give me, I said, men and women. I say it again—men and women.'

'And the thoughts of men and women—what they think about the world and themselves and your class, Frances. It is useful knowledge, even if it does not help you to play the game.'

'So long as I am not compelled to associate with them I have no objection to looking at them, or to reading about them. It would be as a branch of natural history, except for the fact that these people may interfere with us. Their thoughts, I suppose, are mostly discontented; and their intentions, if they had any, would be revolutionary. But they are interesting, and I am glad I came.'

By this time the Hall was full to overflowing: the people were crammed in the galleries; they stood on the back-benches; they filled up the gangways; they climbed over the orchestra partition and stood, a mass of young men, in that capacious pew; they crowded the doors; they were packed tight on the stairs: there was no more room left to put in an umbrella.

'It is seven o'clock,' I said. 'Time's up. The man you are going to hear to-night, Frances—the strong man—the man who has ambitions such as you would like me to have——'

'I never thought you ought to be a local demagogue, George.'

'He is coming out immediately. He knows the people pretty well, and they know him. This evening he will pronounce one of a series of orations he has delivered on the questions of the day. The Captain tells me that he has set the people thinking and talking in a very surprising way. You see how they are discussing things. All these discussions are on the text of his last address.'

'The Wonderful Person of Wapping. I await him with interest.'

Then the orator appeared, stepping out from the wings, and walked quietly to his place beside a small table, which, with a decanter and tumbler, formed the only furniture of the stage. The background, representing a rural scene, with woods, and a lake and a bridge, did not, somehow, seem incongruous with an address bristling with hard facts and practical conclusions. A bright country landscape, sunny and beautiful, is really far more appropriate to an address which uplifts the heart than a picture of a mean street, or of men and women toiling over mean and ill-paid labour.

There was no chairman. At the outset one had been proposed, but the lecturer scoffed at the suggestion, said that he could very well introduce himself, and propose for himself a vote of thanks. He therefore stood alone. In his hand he bore a bundle of papers, which he carefully placed in order on the table for reference.

Then he stood upright, facing his audience, and bowed slightly to the round of applause which greeted him.

Lady Frances saw a tall, broad-shouldered, and singularly handsome young man, with a broad square forehead—the light fell full upon it—clear eyes, hair in very short brown curls—such curls as denote strength—a serious face—too serious for his time of life; but, then, it is only your light comedian, your touch-and-go comic man, who can face an audience with a grin, and it is only a ballet-girl who can appear with a smile. There was not, however, the slightest touch of embarrassment or stage fright about him. He stood easily, in an assured attitude, standing well apart from the table, so that his figure was practically the only thing to be seen upon the stage. He was dressed in faultless evening clothes, with a white flower in his buttonhole. This was the man who, a few weeks before, scoffed at the observance of evening dress, and sneered at the niminy-piminy ways of the fine gentleman.

'Why,' whispered Lady Frances, 'the man is dressed like a gentleman. What does he do that for? He is only talking to workpeople. Look at his face, George; it says as plain as if he were speaking, "I am not afraid—I am a better man than anybody here."'

The orator held up his hand. Everybody settled in his place; everybody adjusted his feet—mostly under the benches; every other person cleared his throat; the women who had come with their husbands looked up at the orator and round the room; then they took up their knitting again, and abstracted their thoughts into some useful line, such as boots and the acquisition of boots. The people on the stairs loudly besought those within to make room for them; one might as well implore the sardines to lie a little closer in their box. So they wailed aloud, like the foolish virgins, because they could not enter. And then the orator began.

I am profoundly sorry that I cannot, in this place, give you even the heads of this discourse; because his words and his facts were forcible and convincing, and I am sure, dear reader, you would like to be hammered with facts and convinced with reasons. I cannot, however, do so, for the simple reason that the laws of copyright forbid. The orations are now published, and everybody can get them and read them.

He began, however, with a personal point.

'I told you,' he said, 'at the outset, that I am here because I propose to represent this borough at the next General Election. The reason why I have taken the trouble to address you is that you will be my constituents, and it is always best when a man has got opinions of his own that he should instruct his constituents upon them. Mine are not opinions: they are convictions; and my convictions, as I have shown you so far, are simple truths. You are all the better, I am quite sure, for having learned those truths; you will talk much less nonsense, and you will advocate much more sensible measures. So much, of course, you will acknowledge. Now, the next General Election is said to be close upon us. No one can possibly know for certain how close it is, but we may expect it any day. Therefore it is well that I have educated you to support my candidature.

'I also told you at the outset that I mean to enter the House as an Independent Member. I am informed that no Independent Member is of any importance in the House; that he cannot influence votes that belong to this party or that party; that the House is divided into this flock of sheep and that flock of sheep, which follow their leaders when the bell rings. Very good. My friend, I don't want to influence votes in the House. I want to influence you—you—you—not the House at all. I care nothing about the House. It is through the House that one speaks to the country, nay, to the world, if one is strong enough. I desire to speak the truth about things that I know, the exact plain truth, which they do not hear in the House—the forces which drive us; the way we are driven; the thing that has to be done. I want to speak out to the whole world by speaking in the House. Oh, I am not afraid! Men will laugh at such a confession. It is a worthy and noble ambition, and, my constituents, I mean to prove myself, yes, myself, worthy of that noble ambition. Very well. Now, remember that when I am elected I am not going to call myself your servant, nor shall I have the hypocrisy to pretend that I am sent to the House with a mandate from you. Why, you don't think I am going to accept any instructions from anybody here, do you? You to give me—ME—instructions? My dear people, understand that your collective wisdom is no more than the wisdom of the best man among you, and your best man isn't a tenth part of the man that I am in knowledge, or in ability either. Do not make any mistake. You may be my servants if you please; it is the best thing in the world for you to learn of me, to question me, to elect me, but I shall never be your servant. You can teach me nothing, but I can teach you a great deal. Understand, then, I shall be an Independent Member in every sense—free of interference of party, free of interference of constituents. So you had better make up your mind at once to turn out one of your present members—I do not in the least care which—and to put me in his place. But, by the Lord, I tell you, I promise you, I will make you proud of your member!'

He stopped. This was only the prologue—the forewords. He drank a little water and took up his papers.

The people, so far from resenting this plainness of speech, clapped and applauded mightily.

'His assurance becomes him,' said Lady Frances. 'A more arrogant speech I never heard. After that, they are bound to elect him.'

And then he turned to his subject. He had at least the gift of oratory, and the first and the most important part of this gift is the power of clear and orderly arrangement; he knew how to select his points, and to present them so that a child might understand; he knew how to repeat them; to present them again in another form, yet still so as to be intelligible to all; he knew how to present them a third time, so that there should be no chance of forgetting them. He had a flexible, rich, and musical voice, which rolled in thunder in the roof, or dropped to the soft strains of a silver flute. He knew when to stir the people's hearts, and when to make them follow to a cold chain of reason; when to make them laugh, and when to make them cry. The man played with his audience; and if you watched him, as Lady Frances did, you would observe that he rejoiced in his power; there were moments when he used this power wantonly—for his own pleasure when it was not wanted. Now and then, when he trampled upon some pet prejudice and exposed some cherished illusion, there were sounds of disagreement, but faintly expressed and quickly hushed. Thus he spoke of Socialism:

'Do not,' he said, 'be led away by theories of what may be or might be. We are concerned with what is, not with what may be. Man is born alone—absolutely alone in the world; he grows up alone; he learns alone; he works alone; he has his diseases alone; he thinks alone; he lives alone; he dies alone. The only thing that seems to take away his loneliness is his marriage. Then, because he has another person always in the house with him, he feels perhaps that he is not quite so lonely as he thought. It is illusion, but it cheers him up. Every man is quite alone. Remember that. Everything that he has is his alone; he cannot give it away if he wishes. His face belongs to himself alone—there is no other face like his in the whole world, and there never has been. In the Resurrection of the millions and millions of the long-forgotten dead there will be no face like any other face—no man like any other man. Quite alone. He cannot part with his gifts, his hereditary powers and weaknesses, his learning, his skill of hand and eye; his thoughts, his memory, his history, his doings, his follies—nothing that he has can he impart to any other living creature. It all belongs to him. He is alone in the world.

'Quite alone—he and his property. Remember this, and when you hear men talk of things equal and things equally divided, ask how the most important property of all is to be divided—a man's strength and skill and ability. For you are not equal; there is no equality. Nature—the Order of Creation—screams it loudly to you; she proclaims it from the mountain-tops, she whispers it in the rustling of the leaves, in the flow of the water, and in the breath of the spring. You are not equal. Nothing that was ever made is the equal of any other thing. You are all unequal; you have diversities of gifts; one is a giant and one is a dwarf; one can make and one can only destroy; you are all unequal. That is the voice of Nature. What follows? We who are individual and unequal have to provide for ourselves. Man is still a creature who hunts and lives by the chase. The rest shapes itself; the strong man tramples down the weak; we associate ourselves together so that the strong man may not too much oppress the weak; wages, hours, work, holidays, prices—all rest upon the will of the strong man, and he is ruled by the will of one stronger than himself. You who are strong, preserve your strength, learn to use it. You will form combinations for your protection against the stronger man. Good: if your strength is greater than his, you will get what you want; if his is greater than yours, you will lose. Above all things, be strong. All the systems, all the experiments, that the world has ever seen, terminate in the victory of the strong man, to whom belongs, and ever will belong, the round world and all that therein is.'

This was only a bit out of the middle of the oration. You will find plenty of pages in the printed book as strong as this passage.

He concluded at last, amid a storm of cheers and shouting.

At the door, as we went out, we met Captain Dering. I introduced him briefly.

'I saw you in the private box,' said the Captain, taking off his hat to Lady Frances. 'What did I tell you? He winds 'em about like a bit o' string; he does what he likes with 'em. They're afraid of him, and yet they can't help coming to hear him. They'll go away—a whole lot of the chaps are rank Socialist scum'—the old sailor called them 'scum': did one ever know a Socialist sailor?—'they'll go away and curse him. But they'll come again, all the same.'

'And will they vote for him?' asked Lady Frances.

'They will. To a man. Because he isn't afraid to have a mind of his own, and to speak it out, and to let 'em know what he thinks about their collective wisdom. Lord! their wisdom! Look here, now. With permission, Madam.' The Captain was courtesy itself with a lady passenger. 'It's the same all the world over. And if you want to see what all the world wants, go and look for it aboard ship, because a ship is a world by itself. Very good. What do the sailors want? A man who palavers and pretends to take their advice? Not a bit of it. A man who talks about their wisdom? Not a bit of it. They know they've got no wisdom. They can't even pretend to navigate a ship. They want a man to take the command; a skipper who will say, "Go there; do this, —— you!" begging your pardon, Madam. Ask their advice! I'd like to see a sailor's face if his captain asked his advice.'

'You like a strong man everywhere, Captain Dering,' said Lady Frances. 'So do I.'

'It's the same everywhere. They talk about this and that. They ask questions and pretend to know. And the candidate, he just pretends to ask their advice humble-like, and promises to take their advice when he's got it, and goes to the House with his tongue in his cheek. What all the world wants, Madam, is a captain to give the word of command and to navigate the vessel.'

'Then, you do think he will get in? I hope he will. He should have a thousand votes if I had them.'

'If he doesn't, he'll just take and knock their silly heads together.'

'George,' said Lady Frances, as we drove away, 'I have had a most delightful evening. Thank you, ever so much, for bringing me here. Your orator is a very strong man indeed. He speaks like a gentleman, yet he called himself a Master Craftsman—I suppose from some proud humility. "We are all working men," I heard the Archbishop say once. I thought it was rather humbug.'

'This man is indeed a Master Craftsman. He understands honest work with his hands as well as any working man present. In fact, better.'

'He appeared in evening dress. Do Master Craftsmen habitually wear evening dress?'

'The garb proclaimed the difference between his audience and himself. He does not appear before them as a workman, but as their master in every sense. The evening clothes are an allegory, you see. He told them pretty plainly that he is their master.'

'He did indeed.'

'Seeking election, not in order to carry out any views of theirs, you see, but to advance his own views. I think he was quite right to put on the dress-coat.'

'He certainly speaks like a man who knows things.'

'The things that man knows, Frances, would sink a three-decker. And the things he does not know couldn't float a canoe.'

'Your metaphors are mixed, George; but you mean well.'

'You perceived, of course, that he is not a scholar. These self-taught men never are. He lacks the literary phrase, except, perhaps, when he comes to personal appeal. But the literary phrase may come. He acquires everything with amazing ease the moment he learns that it is necessary.'

'Necessary? For what?'

'For his personal ambition. Frances, you have seen to-night the chrysalis. Very soon, I believe, you will see the—the other creature—which comes out of the chrysalis. This man—you have heard what he says—means to become a power in the House—that is the ambition which most pleases you. He will, he calmly prophesies, be invited in a few years to become a Cabinet Minister; after that, Prime Minister; then—perhaps—Protector of the Realm. He is as determined as Cromwell; as clear-headed and as able—as ruthless, perhaps; and perhaps, also, as selfish.'

'If he can debate as well as he can speak he ought to get on. A man like that always begins as a Radical. He wants to pull down the Church and the Lords, of course.'

'On the contrary, he would pull down neither Church nor Lords. He would, I believe, enlarge the borders of both. You heard him say that he was going to be an Independent Member?'

'Then, George, speaking as the daughter of a Prime Minister, I say that he will dig his own grave. Tell him that he must belong to a Party, if he would get on. He must—tell him he must! If he does not, he would do far better to remain outside.'

'I have told him so over and over again. But he is as obstinate as a Western mule.'

'And he is—your cousin! I had forgotten that. Why, it accounts for the strange resemblance. I was haunted all the time by his likeness. I could not think what likeness. It is you, George; he is strangely like you. Only bigger, I think.'

'Yes; bigger all over, and more ambitious, Frances.'

'Oh! and he is teaching you his trade. And what have you taught him, George?'

'Nothing worth speaking of. You see, a man brought up at Wapping, which is only a little isolated slip of ground between dock and river—a kind of island—has very few chances of acquiring the air of society.'

'George, you have taught your cousin manners—I know you have. And you are going to introduce him about. Do you think that he will not betray himself?'

'I hope he will, because there will be no pretence. But in all essentials he will be fit for presentation in your own drawing-room, Frances, where I hope to bring him with your permission.'

'Bring him, by all means. It is always a happiness to meet a strong and clever man. I think your cousin, to look at him and to listen to him, must be as clever as he is strong. George, give him, if you can, a lighter style. It is all very well to be intensely earnest at certain points—especially the weakest in an address—but he must not be intensely earnest all through. Make him cultivate repartee and epigram. Teach him to laugh a little, and to smile a little. A man nowadays, even a man who is going to pull down the House of Commons by the two pillars, should laugh and smile a little beforehand. But he is a strong man, George, and a very interesting man.'

CHAPTER XII.

THE PHYSICIAN.

When we assembled for early dinner on Monday I looked to see some effect of our little afternoon voyage and talk on Isabel. Alas! the cloud hung again over her head—a visible, dark cloud. She sat timidly glancing at her lover, who was also her liege and lord; more timidly, perhaps, because Robert had now begun to put off his silent habit and to talk at dinner—one result of his West End experience. This astonished and rather terrified her, because words from Robert were generally words of admonition; and more uneasily, perhaps, because he was talking about persons of whom she understood nothing. I say persons: so great was the change already that Robert talked of persons as well as principles; and he, who was formerly as chary of his laughter as Saturn or as a Scottish divine, had now begun to laugh readily and cheerfully.

For my own part, the talk of Saturday afternoon and the revelation of the girl's unhappiness so mightily impressed me—one can never bear to see a girl in sorrow—that I had been thinking ever since how Isabel's life might be bettered for her. I could only think of two ways: first, to lighten her work; secondly, to introduce a little change. As for the former, she was housekeeper, and kept the household accounts, which was enough for one girl to attempt; also, she was accountant to 'Burnikel and Burnikel,' and kept the books of the house and paid the men. Keeping the books meant a laborious and old-fashioned system of double book-keeping, which took a great deal of her time. This alone was enough for one girl to attempt. She was, further, private secretary; she hunted up passages, copied passages, made notes, and wrote all Robert's letters. This alone was quite enough for one girl to attempt; and, lastly, she had to look after her own dress, and I am sure that this is, by itself, quite enough to occupy all the time of a conscientious girl. As regards getting some change of scene, the only way was to bring the change to her, and that, I saw clearly, must be my task.

It is a delicate thing to interfere between a man and his mistress, even when the mistress is not the object of any fondling and nonsense—even when she is also accountant, secretary, and housekeeper. I therefore approached the subject diplomatically.

'Boat-building,' I said, working round to it by an unexpected path, 'is a business of selling as well as of making, isn't it?'

'Go on,' he replied cheerfully; 'what are you driving at?'

'This, first: I am getting on very well with the craft, but I don't know much about the trade.'

'You know very little about the trade, and I fear you never will; because, George, though you may make me a gentleman—to look at—no one will ever make you a tradesman.'

'Why not?'

'Because you've been brought up different. You haven't our feeling for money. Every coin with us means money saved, or money won. A sovereign means victory in a pitched battle. With you it comes out of an inexhaustible bag. See now. If you want to go anywhere, you take a cab. It comes natural to you. Lord! I laugh when I see you calling a cab. We take a penny 'bus. If we must take a cab, we give him a shilling, reckoning up the fare and measuring the distance; we grudge that shilling. You toss him half a crown, and think nothing of it. You tip waiters and porters with sixpences and shillings; we never tip anybody at all if we can help it. When you want to have anything, you order it without asking the price; we cast about to get it cheap, or we do without it. When you do ask the price you pay at once whatever they tell you, or you have it put down. We know better; we know that a price means what they can get, not what they please to ask: we beat them down. Then you go to the dearest people to buy things. We know that the dear people are no better than the cheap, because the same workmen make for both. We study the pence; you throw away the pounds.'

'My dear cousin, the period approaches when I shall have nothing but pence to study. However, what I wanted to say was this: The time seems to have come when I ought to learn something of the trade side.'

'Well, I will tell you what you please.'

'There are the prices of materials, the cost of labour, rent, taxes, selling prices—all these things. The best way for me to learn is not to worry you, but to read and examine your books. Everything is there, of course.'

Robert did not reply for a few moments. It is the instinct of a man of business to wish his affairs to loom large in the imagination of humanity. His books alone conceal the real truth.

'If it was any other man,' he said, 'or for any other purpose—but as it's you, take the books and examine them. They are in the safe over the way. Isabel has the key.'

'Thank you. With her help I will not only look at them, but, for a term, keep them for you.'

'You can't keep them. You don't know book-keeping by double entry.'

'Isabel shall teach me, and your books cannot be very complicated.'

'Very well. Have it your own way.'

So that was done. I could thus take a great load off the girl's frail shoulders. Then I went on to the other points.

'Isabel,' I said, 'is not looking well.'

'She looks exactly the same to-day as she did six months ago.'

'No; she is not looking at all well. She is not naturally, I should say, a strong girl. If I were you, Robert, I would speak to someone about her.'

'Why?' he answered impatiently. 'She hasn't told me she was ill. What is the matter with her?'

'Too much confinement; too little change.'

'I've noticed nothing wrong.'

'No, you see her every day; you would hardly notice a gradual change. Can't you see, however, that she is pale and nervous?'

'She is always pale and nervous. Is she more pale and nervous than usual?'

'There is a furrow in her forehead; there are black lines under her eyes; and her cheek is thin.'

'This,' said the fond but injured lover, 'comes of having women about one. Why can't she tell me if she is not well?'

'You must have noticed how silent she is—and how she droops her head.'

'She is always silent. She knows that I don't like chatter. As for drooping her head, I suppose she carries her head as she likes.'

'No doubt. At the same time, Robert, she is in a bad way. I am certain of it.'

'Well'—he hesitated—'what am I to do? Look here, George, you know more than I do about women. It's no use talking to the Captain, and there's only the cook besides: what am I to do?'

'I should say, give her, first, more fresh air, less work, more amusement, change of scene.'

'Good Lord, man! how am I to give her change of scene? You don't mean that I am to give up my work just now, when the Election may be sprung upon us at any moment, in order to go dawdling and dangling about with a woman?'

'Well, I'll help a bit, if you agree.'

'Agree? I should think I would agree! Go on.'

'I have taken over the books of the Firm. That will be a great relief to her. As for you, don't give her, just now, things to copy; write your own letters. Then she will have nothing left but the housekeeping, which is a simple matter.'

'Well, and what about the change of scene?'

'I was thinking—if you don't mind—that I could take her out occasionally—on Saturdays or Sundays—and perhaps in the long evenings.'

'If you would, and if it would do her any good. I don't want to be hard on the girl, George. You know how busy I am, and what a lot I have to think about. She's a good and obedient girl on the whole. I can't, you see, be worrying myself continually about the day by day looks of my clerks and people.'

'Isabel is hardly a "clerk and people," is she?'

'Of course not. But you know what I mean.'

'I believe I know what you mean. Your thoughts are always concerned with things that seem to you of far more importance than a woman's health.'

'That is so,' he replied, impervious to the shaft of satire.

'Well, Robert, I will do what I can. While we are talking about Isabel, there is another thing on my mind. We may assume, I suppose, that you are going to succeed.'

'You may certainly assume so much. Why, else, do I take all this trouble?'

'Well, when you are a great man—a man of society—it will be a matter of some importance that your wife should hold her own in society.'

Robert coloured. 'Why shouldn't Isabel hold her own? A woman has got nothing to do but to sit down and take what comes.'

'There are many ways of sitting down.'

'You mean, I suppose, that her case is—like my own. Do you want to send Isabel into Piccadilly to learn manners?'

'Her case is not so bad as yours,' I told him plainly. 'But it is a case of the same kind.'

'I always thought she was a quiet, modest kind of girl, else I could never have promised to marry her; but I dare say you are right. After my own experiences—I am a good bit wiser than I was—I suppose that there are ways and customs that a woman should know—that can't be learned in this corner of the world.'

'She wants manner—that is the only thing she wants, except happiness, perhaps. I cannot impart manner to her, but I can show her women who have it. Remember, Robert, it may be of the utmost importance to you, at some future time, that your wife should show by her manner that she is accustomed to society.'

I knew, of course, while I spoke, that such a thing is absolutely impossible. A girl brought up as Isabel had been could never acquire the real air and manner which belongs to the gentlewoman born and bred. All kinds of virtues, graces, charms, attractions, allurements, arts, and accomplishments, may be acquired by a woman, but this one quality she inherits or develops from infancy. Not that it is a charm above all others, as some women fondly believe. By no means. For my own part, I have learned that a woman may lack this charm as she may lack other things, and yet be above and beyond all other women in the world in the eyes of her lover.

'I suppose,' said Robert, 'that you are right.'

'Very good. Then I will sometimes take her where she will see well-dressed women. You shall see, after a bit, how her pale cheeks will put on roses, and her listless manner will become cheerful. Oh! and there is something else. She must practise her music more—she is starved for want of music. She must practise in the day-time. Perhaps she might sing a little. It won't disturb you.'

'All right,' he said. 'Oh! it's all right. Have it your own way. Perhaps you'd like the workmen over the way to sing a chorus while she strums the piano? Perhaps you'd like to do a breakdown in the road? Only make her get well, George, without troubling me. And don't look as if it's my fault that she's a bit pale.'

That day, after dinner, Robert went his way as usual. The Captain went another way. Isabel, the cloth being removed, spread out her books upon the table and sat down with a little sigh.

I sat down on the other side, leaning my elbows on the table.

'Isabel,' I said, 'you've got to be obedient to your Physician.'

'I must go on with my master's work, please, Physician. When that is done I will be obedient.'

I took the books from her, shut them up, and put my hand upon them. 'There!' I said; 'now you are not going to trouble yourself about these books any more. Thus saith the Healer.'

'What do you mean?'

'I have spoken to the Commander-in-Chief. He graciously consents that I shall take over these books for the future. All you have to do is to show me how you book-keep by double entry. He further consents to write his own letters with his own hand—letters about his borough and all. He will give no more extracts, arguments, and illustrations to copy out for his speeches. You are released. He thinks further that, if you housekeep with diligence, and look after your dress with zeal, and make yourself look pretty and desirable, you will have quite enough to do.'

She blushed a rosy red. 'Robert didn't say that! Oh, impossible!'

'He didn't exactly say so, in so many words'—in fact, it was impossible—'but I have no doubt that he really meant it.'

'It was you who said it, and meant it, too,' she murmured.

'The Commander-in-Chief further expresses his desire that you should practise your playing all day long, if you like, and your singing too, if you can sing. Nothing is better for the chest than singing.'

'I have never learned. I only sing in church.'

'I will get you some songs and some new music. Plenty of music, that is my first prescription; plenty of singing, that is the second prescription; laughing, if you can find anything to laugh at. You can laugh at me if you like; I wish you would. You don't know the good it would do you. Dancing, if there is anyone to dance with; you can dance with me if you like; I wish you would. Flowers for the windows, and to brighten up this old house. Change of air and of scene. You shall go with me somewhere next Saturday.'

She stared in amazement. 'What does all this mean?' she asked.

'It means, Isabel, that Robert is seriously concerned about your looks, and it means that we have considered together what to do with you, and that these are the measures we have adopted.'

'Robert seriously concerned about me? Robert anxious about my looks?'

She covered her face with her hands to hide the tears that arose. 'It would matter nothing to Robert if I were dying. He would notice nothing, and he would care nothing. I belong to him, that is all; so does his chair. Oh, it is you—you who have done this. It is all your kindness—yours—and I am almost a stranger to you. And Robert, who is to be my husband, has never all the time said one word of kindness—not one word of kindness. And as to——' She stopped, with sobbing.

'Nay, Isabel; take all this as an act of kindness. It is not his way to say words of affection.'

She shook her head. 'Not one word of kindness. Robert cares nothing for me—nothing.'

'And you?'

'Oh, I tremble day and night to think that I must marry him. George, you asked me for my secret; that is my secret. If I could go away anywhere—to be housemaid even—I would go. But I cannot—I cannot; and he will never give me up unless—— Oh, I pray night and morning that he may find another woman and fall in love with her. But he will not—oh, he cannot; he does not know what love means; his heart is as hard as a stone, and he thinks of nothing but himself.'

'I will keep your secret, Isabel,' I replied gravely. 'Let us never speak of it again; and perhaps, when he gets on in the world, he will soften.'

She shook her head again.

'Play me something, my child, and soothe your own soul while you play.'

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE FIELDS.

I GAVE her new music, some books of songs, some books of poetry, and some novels of a kind that I thought she would like. I filled the windows with flowers, insomuch that Robert groaned; I gave her flowers for the table.

In the evening I took her on the river for an hour of the fresh strong air which sweeps up with the flow and down with the ebb; and on Saturday I took her for a little journey into the country.

I wanted real country, not cockney country, though that is not to be despised. Isabel was clad, I well remember, in a summer dress of some soft and light material. Perhaps it was not trimmed exactly as a Bond Street dressmaker would approve. She wore a hat which had been bought in the neighbourhood of Aldgate, yet it was a pretty hat; and with a touch of colour round her neck, and a flower at her throat, she looked a very dainty damsel indeed. And, oh, the blindness, and the coldness, and the stony-heartedness of her *fiancé*, who would have no kissing, and fondling, and foolishness. In this respect, though we were sprung from the same stock, I am not ashamed to confess that in my principles, not to speak of practice, we were hopelessly at variance.

'Permit me to observe, Isabel,' I remarked judicially, 'that you look very nice, and that your dress becomes you.'

'Oh!' She coloured with pleasure; she was so unused to compliments, you see. 'I am so glad you like it. If you had not made Robert give up all that work I should not have found time to make it.'

'Well, I thought of taking you by rather a long journey, if you don't mind that—to Rickmansworth. Then you shall walk through a lovely park that I know of, and then we shall be picked up by a trap and drive to Chenies, there to dine, and go home in the cool of the evening. Will that suit you, Isabel?'

'Anything suits me that suits you, George; only I am afraid——'

'What are you afraid of?'

'I am afraid of you. Oh, not that way'—she did not explain what way—'only you belong to another world almost. I am afraid that I shall be such a stupid companion. I don't even talk your language; and you always look so happy. I am ashamed to be seen with anyone who looks so happy.'

I laughed. Afraid of me! As if any woman in the world could ever be afraid of me! 'Why,' I told her, 'I go in perpetual awe and adoration of all women. I look happy because you condescend to walk with me. Women are all goddesses. I worship in fear——' So she smiled, and resigned herself to fate, and we set off.

From Wapping to Rickmansworth is a long journey: it takes an hour and a half. In the underground Isabel began to talk again about Robert.

'I am ashamed,' she said, 'of having told you what I did last Monday; I am ashamed of feeling so—afraid of Robert. You will think me the most unworthy person in the world when I tell you that it is gratitude—the deepest gratitude—that ought to bind us to Robert. Did he ever tell you how we came to his house? No? Well, I will tell you, and then you will understand what I mean. It is five years since we came to him. I was sixteen then. We are his cousins. He could not get on with his mother. She was a very grand lady—I remember her—who dressed in black silk, and wore a large gold chain, and wanted to rule everybody. And Robert was the master, and he intended to be master, in which he was quite right. So they couldn't agree, and his mother went out to her other sons in Tasmania. Then Robert remembered us. Just then it was, oh, a terrible time with us. I used to lie awake crying and praying for help. And Robert brought the help.'

'What was the trouble?'

'Father had a stroke—you see how lame he is—and he couldn't go to sea any more, and there was no money at all.'

'Oh, but that was terrible.'

'Yes. They were trying to get father into the Trinity Almshouse, and I was to go and do something—become a barmaid, perhaps. Then Robert found us out. "Come and live with me," he said. And so we came. I was to be his secretary, and to keep the books and the house.'

'And that you have continued ever since. Yes. And you have never been outside Wapping once all that time?'

'Oh yes; now and then I go as far as Aldgate.'

'Have you been into any kind of society? Have you had any kind of change?'

'No; we have no visitors here, and I have been too busy to think of change.'

'That is just it; you have been too busy. Don't talk to me of gratitude, Isabel. Robert has taken from you more than he has given. Not that he is to be blamed. Robert, you see, is such a strong sort that he never wants any change, and he thinks that nobody else does. Why, you've lost what ought to have been your happiest days. Why, you ought to have been a princess.'

'Please, George——' She stopped me, turning red. 'Remember that, whatever I have lost, I have never heard foolish compliments.'

'If you call that foolish—— But I refrain. So, little one, you entered upon the boat-building business; and you saw Robert, naturally, every day.'

'Yes; all day long.'

'And he — he — I mean you — presently accepted him.'

She blushed again. 'Yes; he said he must have a wife some time or other, and he would marry me. But he had a great deal to do first, and I must not expect him to—to——'

'I know. The most singular limitation of an engagement on record.'

'If I could make him happy, how could I refuse? Besides, I was afraid to refuse. And we owed everything to him. But it won't have to be for a great while yet—not for years.'

The train arrived at the station. I ordered a conveyance to meet us at Chorley Common, and I took Isabel by a way that I knew through the Park.

There is nothing in the world, I believe, lovelier than an English park in early summer. Wild places—lofty mountains, tall peaks, dark ravines, broad glaciers, black forests, cliffs white, cliffs red, cliffs black—touch another note. The tranquillity, the quiet beauty of the Park, fills the soul with rest and calm. The Alps do not call forth the same kind of emotion as a stately park.

I do not know how long it was since Isabel had been in the country. She looked about her with a kind of stupor. There were tall trees, not in lines, but single; all with their lower branches at the same height above the sward—the height, that is, to which the deer can reach; the foliage was at its best; the turf was green and soft and elastic; a skylark was singing up above; a blackbird was repeating his pretty, tuneful lay close beside us; there was a confused chatter from the bridge; the buttercups covered the low-lying part; beyond us ran the river, the little river Chess, winding among the meadows. The air that fanned the soft cheeks of the girl breathed refreshment. We were quite alone save for the birds and the trees, and afar off a herd of deer.

'What do you think of it, Isabel?'

She made answer with the simple interjection which is used for everything beyond the power of speech. There is no other word in any language half so useful or half so expressive, because, you see, it expresses every possible form of emotion—love, pain, pleasure, hope, fear, admiration, joy, despair.

'Come,' I said; 'we must not stay too long.'

'Oh! But not to hurry. It is wonderful; to think that these lovely places are all around us and we never see them! George, to live all the time in that corner and never to see these things! Oh, is it life?'

'No, Isabel, it is not life: it is prison. But courage, we have broken prison. The doors are open. We shall see lots of things rare and beautiful now. This is only a beginning.'

So we walked on more slowly, because this part of the Park is not very big. In order to show off my country lore, I carried on a little running commentary. 'That whistle is the blackbird's; that is the thrush; did you hear the cuckoo? You must run for luck. That is the blackcap; that is the complaint of the willow warbler.'

'You know them all,' she said jealously, 'and I know not a single one. Oh, how ignorant I am of everything—everything!'

'I will teach you. I am sure you will be an apt scholar. You shall learn the flowers, too—the names of all the flowers; I have got some good by being born in the country. I can teach you the birds, and their song and their flight; and the flowers, and their seasons and their history; and the trees and the leaves. We had a country house once; there was another one near us, with a huge park, where I used to wander with Frances.'

'Who was Frances?'

'Lady Frances was the daughter of the Earl of Clovelly, formerly Prime Minister. Her mother was a great political lady who had a *salon.*'

'What is a *salon?*'

'She received in her house the men of the party; encouraged the deserving, rebuked the lazy, and strengthened those who wobbled. You still do not understand? I will explain further, not now. Briefly this, Frances and I were great friends always, and we learned those things when we were children together.'

'Are you engaged to Lady Frances?' she asked sharply.

'Oh dear no! There is no question of engagement between us. We are like brother and sister. Frances is a young widow; if she were to marry again, it would be to a strong man, full of ambition, who would advance himself and enable her to become what her mother was.'

'She should marry Robert, if she wants a strong man.'

'Indeed, she might do worse. Now, Isabel, this is the wildest place anywhere round London; you are quite in the country; there are no houses to be seen, no roads, no railways, nothing but trees, and grass, and sky, and flowing river. Sit down on this trunk and rest, and don't try to tell me how much you like it.'

We sat down on a fallen tree: the sunshine lay on the rippling waters where the light breeze here and there lifted the surface into a little crest of wave, or where it was broken by the leaping of a fish; there were wild ducks overhead flying in two straight lines that joined at a single duck, to make an angle of thirty degrees—not that Isabel asked what angle they made—and higher up was flying a pair of herons, their long legs stretched out behind them.

No one, I say, was in the Park; nor was there any sign or sound of any human creature: the leaves of spring were at their earliest and their loveliest; the chestnuts were in bloom; and the girl sat with hands folded in her lap, carried away by the spectacle of the abounding joy of spring. Perhaps for the first time in all her cribbed and cabined youth, she felt the full joy of life. It fell upon her in waves; it made her faint; it filled her with a new emotion. Shall we ever become too old to remember the joy of life in adolescence—the yearning after we know not what—the happiness of the sunshine, the air, the water, the green trees, the birds—the fulness and the sweetness and the innocence of it—the consciousness of understanding for the first time what life means—how happy it may be—if the gods permit—how glorious and how abundant are Nature's gifts to bless the living? We cannot thus clothe the thoughts of the young with words; youth is hardly conscious of them. I am sure that Isabel could not describe the emotions that filled her soul. Words are only possible long after the thing itself is over and done with, and possible no longer. We who are old can never again feel that overwhelming, supreme, passionate joy of life; but we can remember—sometimes. When did it first fall upon you, dear reader? Like the Wesleyans, let us exchange experiences. Were you alone? Was there a companion to share your passions? Was it on some bright day in early summer among woods and streams and the song of birds that this sense of an all-abundant nature and a life capable of feeling all, embracing all, receiving all, fell upon you, and carried you for a brief space—a space all too brief—beyond yourself?

'I have never seen this place before,' she murmured, as if the place alone was the cause of this strange and unknown feeling, and as if she could not choose but say something.

'We will come here again,' I said.

For her face was flushed, and her eyes were brighter than was their wont, her hands were tightly clutched, and her lips were parted. She was in a highly-nervous condition when we started. Now she looked like one trying to repress some over-mastering emotion.

'I have never dreamed; I have never thought,' she continued.

'You have lived too long in a dull house, Isabel.'

The words came from afar off; she heard nothing.

She sprang to her feet. 'Oh!' she cried, 'I must run; I cannot sit still.' She threw out her arms, she was carried away; she was drunk with the new-born joy of life. 'I must sing.' She lifted up her voice, her clear, full voice, and sang; and—wonderful to relate!—she sang the words of a hymn:

'Oh, God of Hosts, the mighty Lord,
  How lovely is the place
Where Thou, enthroned in glory, show'st
  The brightness of Thy face!'

'Isabel!' I cried, 'you are transformed!'

She was: not the finest actress in the whole world could so change herself in a moment of time; not the greatest Queen of Tragedy could so stand with outstretched arms, with flaming cheek and parted lips—as if to welcome and to drink in all—all—all that Nature had wherewith to bless the living. In that moment I discovered the ideal Isabel, the possible Isabel, the dream of the sculptor—a lovely dream, a divine ideal! For a moment I thought of the old worships—the worship of Nature; the worship of the Sun; the procession of the seasons—the pageant of the year; the votaress who was seized with the celestial rapture and sang words unintelligible and danced unearthly steps, and fell at the feet of the god; what was that old ecstasy but this strange extravagance, suddenly awakened in a girl rendered hysterical by long dulness and stupid work, and confinement and the repression of all that is natural in youth?

It lasted a moment only. Then her arms dropped and the colour went out of her cheek, and I caught her as she fell, and laid her gently on the grass. I ran down to the river and brought back a hat full of water, and touched her forehead with a few drops. She quickly recovered and sat up.

'Where am I? What has happened?' she cried. 'Oh! what has happened?'

'Nothing serious, Isabel. Keep quite quiet. The heat, or the sun, or the strangeness, was too much for you. Perhaps you had better lie back for a little.'

'No—no——' She got up. 'I must have fainted. Why did I faint? Oh, I am so ashamed of myself! I cannot understand why I fainted.'

'Well, Isabel, when an ancient Greek met the great god Pan in the forest, he instantly fell dead. So that you ought not to be surprised that you merely fainted when you first saw great Pan's dominion. Will you rest a little longer?'

'No; I am quite recovered. Let us go on, for fear I should faint again.'

So we walked on, through the rest of the Park and came out close to the common called Chorley. Here the carriage was waiting for us, and we drove the rest of the way.

Isabel was very silent. She lay back in the carriage, looking into the woods as we drove along the road. She was in a mood when the soul needs silence. Had I known that she would be so deeply moved, I think I should have hesitated to bring her to such a place. The mind of a maiden is too delicate an instrument for the rough hand of man. He cannot touch the strings, without fear of something snapping. But her cheek was touched with colour and her eyes with light.

We arrived at Chenies. There is a church here with tombs of the Russells. Isabel took no interest in them. There is an old manor-house, the most beautiful manor-house in England—a gem of a house, built of red brick, with creepers all over it, and a stately garden; a house to dream of. But Isabel cared nothing at all about the house, and showed no interest or curiosity in the noble House of Russell. There were the ruins of a small Religious House at the back. Isabel took no interest in the monks or nuns who once lived in this House, nor in the ruins, nor in the little reconstructions of the House which I attempted. But beside the ruins at the back there is a wood, and here we walked in the shade, looking out between the trees at the breadths of sunshine beyond, and up into the branches above at the gleaming sunlight, and between the leaves. She wanted nothing more than just the peace of the wood and the glory of the sunshine.

I tore her away at last. For the hour was seven, and there were lamb cutlets at the little Inn. And it was time for Masterful Man to assert himself.

It is a long way back, as it is a long way to come, and all the way back Isabel sat as one in a dream. I could not wake her out of the dream.

I left her at last at her own door.

'We are home again,' she said. 'Thank you, oh! so much. It has come with me all the way home. I hope it will stay with me. Good-night, George.'

What had come with her? I believe she meant the new-born feeling of the beauty and the joy of the world.

CHAPTER XIV.

MORE LESSONS.

In that way began the companionship that has changed the whole of my life and Isabel's life as well—you shall hear how.

I set myself to work, as I had done with Robert, systematically. I had to drag a girl out of a miserably narrow groove in which she had lived and moved for five years without any change, almost without fresh air; without society; without books; without friends or companions; a burying alive. It is wonderful to me, when I come to think of it, that her finer nature was not wholly destroyed; most girls after such an experience would have become a mere household drudge, or a mere clerk, with, as another natural result of such a life, a snappish temper and a bitter tongue. Perhaps the presence of her father kept Isabel from these evils; the old sailor was always cheerful, though fate had given him small cause for cheerfulness. However, Isabel passed through the time of prison with no lowering of her moral nature. The social side, of course, suffered. I had to show her how other girls dressed, and how they comported themselves. I had to lift her out of the submission and meekness so ill assorted with her beauty. I had also to give her the world of books and of art—an easy task, made easy by the adaptability of the girl and her quick perceptions; a pleasant task, as the charge of a pretty woman always must be; and a dangerous task, because the girl was surely the most lovable creature under the canopy of heaven. Of this danger I had no thought or suspicion. I declare that I was entirely loyal to Robert, until I discovered a fact which changed the whole situation. The fact once discovered, the rest was natural.

My lessons in the study of Nature and Humanity were continued during the months of June and July. On Saturdays we went afield—to Hampton, to Richmond, to Dulwich, to Sydenham, to Loughton, to Chigwell, to Theydon Bois, to Chingford, to St. Alban's —wherever there are trees and gardens to be seen. Or we went up the river to Maidenhead, Bray, Windsor, Weybridge; or down the river to Greenwich. On Sunday morning I took her generally to Westminster, where she heard the silver voices of the choir ringing in the roof while we sat in a corner of the transept beside the tombs. At such a time I would watch her and mark how her spirit was rapt and carried away. When the music ceased we would get up and go out and seek the peaceful cloister, cool and shady, on the south side of the church, and there sit together, mostly in silence.

'Yours are new thoughts, Isabel,' I said one Sunday morning, while we sat in this quiet place.

'They are all new thoughts now,' she replied. 'Thanks to you. What did I think about formerly? I don't remember. Terrors, mostly.'

'And now they are pleasant thoughts?'

'Oh! what can they be but pleasant? You have taken me into another world. How could I live so long, and be so contented?'

'It is a finer and a better world?'

'It is far, far broader, to begin with; and far, far finer. Whether it is better, George, I do not know. I only see it from the outside. It is happier; of that I am quite sure.'

'It may well be happier. As for its being better—I meant better in the sense of more comfortable; you mean more virtuous. Well, nobody knows, not even a Father Confessor, whether one part of the world is more virtuous than another part. You see, we never get to the real inside of any part—not even our own corner. And most of us can never get outside our own corner at all. Nobody else ever lived in such a corner as you; but you haven't got outside that corner yet, and you never will. We only see little bits of the world. My own belief—but I may be wrong—is that we are all pretty much alike; all, as the children say, up and down, and round about—good, and bad, and middling. We are anxious, first of all, and above all, to get as much solid comfort for ourselves as we can.'

She sighed. 'I confess,' she said, 'that I desire happiness more and more. But it is not altogether solid comfort that I look for.'

'Your views of happiness have broadened, Isabel. What made your happiness two months ago?'

'There was no happiness, nor much unhappiness. It seemed now as if I lived always in a sort of twilight. No trees even, except those in the burial-ground; no flowers, no fresh country, no books, no poetry, no Cathedral music.'

'There is a pretty story, an old story, about a prisoner, and about a flower which sprang up, and grew, and blossomed between the chinks of the stones. You are that prisoner, Isabel, and the flower is your soul, which has grown up and blossomed in the dark and narrow prison. But we must not call Robert the gaoler.'

'Oh no, I must not blame Robert; pray do not think that I do. He has been so full of work and thought that, of course, he could not tell; and why should he be dragged out of his way to think of me? And my father is growing old. No, no; there is no one to blame. Not Robert—oh no, never Robert.'

Let me make a clean breast of it; not that I am penitent, but quite the contrary. I ought, I suppose, to have discontinued these little expeditions as soon as I learned what was coming out of them. That would be the line adopted by the sage of seventy springs. I had only five-and-twenty. Moreover, it is very difficult to say when friendship is transformed into love; the young man goes on; the companionship, always delightful, becomes too delightful to give up; the companion creeps into his heart and remains there until one day he awakes to the consciousness that life without that companion will henceforth be intolerable.

But we entered upon the thing loyally; we had no thought of any danger; then, no one interfered with us; we went where we pleased. I began with thinking about Isabel when I ought to have been considering the lines of a boat; I began to think how she looked, what she said; her face haunted me—her sweet, soft face, full of purity, grace, and every womanly virtue; her eyes—her deep and limpid eyes, wells of holy thoughts, charged with goodness; her voice—the tones of her voice, which had become to me the sweetest music in the world. I dreamed of these things at night, I thought of them all day, long before I understood what had happened to me, long before Isabel suspected anything. The last thing, indeed, which the maiden feared or suspected was the thing that happened. She was engaged to Robert; and I was Robert's cousin, and by Robert's permission I was showing her the world. Even a girl who knows the ways of the world, and especially the treacherous, villainous, deceptive ways of young men, and would be therefore suspicious in such a case, might have thought that there was some security in common loyalty and friendship. But Isabel had no knowledge of the world, and no experience of young men, and consequently no suspicion.

This very ignorance of danger made things more dangerous. Her ignorance encouraged her to be perfectly frank and confiding. She showed openly all the pleasure she felt in these little expeditions, and she manifested her innocent affection—I call it affection, not friendship—towards me so unreservedly that it was impossible even to tell her when the thing began, or even when the thing had grown until it became a very furnace of passion.

There you see—it happened so. It was quite natural—it was severely logical—I now understand that nothing else was possible—it was inevitable. No man going about day after day, with so sweet a companion, could fail to fall in love with her. I did fall head over heels, up to my neck, in love. That mattered nothing so long as neither Robert nor Isabel suspected it. As for myself, why, at that time, I did not ask myself what was going to happen, or what would in the end come of it. Enough for me just to enjoy the presence and the sight of her, the touch of her hand, the rustle of her dress. Why, since by marriage we are taught that the man must worship the woman, then was I married to Isabel long before she knew or suspected that I so much as held that form of faith or believed that teaching.

The end—I mean the end of unsuspecting confidence—arrived unexpectedly. It came one evening, about the middle of July, and at sunset. We were sitting in the place where I had taken Isabel first—the park near Rickmansworth. She sang hymns no more, nor did she faint at beholding the splendour and the glory of the world; but she sat in silence, gazing upon the western glow in the sky, and on the flowing river at her feet, where the glow was reflected.

Could this glorious creature be the pale and drooping maiden whom I brought here six weeks before? Now she sat upright, cheeks glowing, eyes uplifted, limpid and lovely eyes, with rounded figure and head erect—a girl full of life and of the joy of youth.

'Of all the places that we have seen together, George,' she said, 'this is the one that I love best.'

'It is where you first felt the beauty of the world, Isabel, and it was too much for you.'

'How came you to think about taking me out? It has been so wonderfully good of you, George. I can never think enough about it.'

'In my capacity of great Physician, I discovered that you were suffering from monotony, so I spoke to Robert, and we arranged it.'

A cloud passed over her face, but only for a moment.

'If our little expeditions have put colour into your cheeks and light into your eyes—your very lovely eyes, Isabel——'

'Please, George, no compliments.'

'Well, then, if they have done you good—there is a nice homely way to put it—I ought to be quite contented and happy. You see, Isabel'—this was rather a risky thing to say; one could not meet her eyes—'it has been so great a happiness to have you for a companion, that you must just think how good it has been of you to come with me.'

Still she did not suspect what was in my mind. When she began to talk about wonderful goodness it was impossible, of course, not to point out that on the other hand I was the one who should be really grateful and deeply obliged for days and evenings of pure and unmixed happiness, reading the soul—so high above my own—the sweet and lovely soul of this most sweet and lovely maiden. I believe I have said these words about her already. Never mind. I say, then, that I was constrained to put the case before her in its true light.

'You say this,' she replied, 'out of your kindness. Of course, I can never believe that you really wanted the company of a girl so shamefully ignorant as myself. Why, I could talk about nothing. Besides, you have that other friend of whom you have told me—Lady Frances. Have you not neglected her?'

'Lady Frances does not mind,' I said. 'And I have not neglected her, and I do assure you, Isabel, that I am perfectly in earnest when I speak about the happiness of your companionship. I wanted, at first, I confess, only to clear away the clouds from your face and from your mind by a change of place and some kind of amusement. I cannot bear to see any girl unhappy. That was all I thought about at first, when we began to go about together. Afterwards——' And here I stopped.

'The clouds are gone,' she replied, 'so there is no more need for any more evenings abroad. Now, I suppose, I must make up my mind to go back to

Wapping, and to stay there. Well, I have a very happy time to remember.'

'Indeed, you shall not, Isabel, if I can help it. Go back to the old life? Not if I have any voice in the matter. Besides, the clouds are not all gone. There is one that falls on you quite suddenly, and sometimes lies upon you for an hour or more. Why, it has fallen now. You cloud over suddenly, Isabel. It is some thought that comes to you uninvited. Your face must be all sunshine or all cloud. Never was such a tell-tale face.'

She blushed; but the cloud lay there still.

'What is it, Isabel? What is this cloud? Is it anything that I can remove?'

'No one can remove it,' she said.

'Is it anything—but I have no right to ask. Only, Isabel, if you like to tell me, I might advise.'

She remained silent, but the tears gathered in her eyes.

'Tell me, Isabel,' I pressed her. 'I asked you once before, in the old burial-ground.'

'I do not dare. I am ashamed. You will think me the most ungrateful of women if I tell you.'

'Then tell me, and let me scold you.'

'It is—it is'—she hung her head—'it is Robert.'

'What has Robert done?'

'It is because he has promised to marry me.'

Then the scales fell from my eyes, and I understood the cloud. I ought to have known. She told me as much before.'

'Oh, he has been so good! I have told you—we owe everything to him—I am bound to him by chains—and yet—yet—— Oh, George, I am telling you everything. I am ashamed—yet I must tell someone, because sometimes I think I shall go mad; it weighs me down night and day. He has promised to marry me; his promises are sacred, and it is the thought of marrying him, never to be away from him; to be with him always; always to be his servant and to do what he orders; and never a single kind word, or one look of interest even, not to speak of—of affection. I am as disregarded as his office-boy; I am nothing more than a machine. How can I do anything but tremble at the thought of marrying such a man?'

'Then you must yourself break off your engagement.'

'No, no. I cannot. You forget, George, that we are his dependents, my father and I, both of us. I must do what Robert wishes—all that Robert wishes.'

I groaned.

'And now you know the meaning of the cloud. I am only happy when I can forget my own future. And all your kindness is thrown away, because the thought of my own future never leaves me altogether—even with you.'

And then it was that I quite lost my self-control.

'Oh, Isabel!' I cried. 'You shall not marry him. Oh, my love! my love! you shall not marry him.'

I took her hands. She cried out and sprang to her feet. I threw my arms round her and kissed her, being carried quite beyond my own control. And I told her, in words that I cannot, dare not, set down here for all the world to see, all that was lying in my heart.

She pushed me from her, and sank back upon the fallen tree on which she had been sitting, and buried her face in her hands.

'Isabel!' I whispered. 'Isabel! if you can love me!'

She gave me her hand. 'Let me hear it once—and say it once, for the first time and the last. Oh, George—and I did not know it!'

I kissed her again and again. It makes my heart leap up still only to think of that moment.

Then she stood up. 'It is the first time and the last, George,' she said. 'I am engaged to your cousin Robert.'

'Yes, Isabel.'

'Now we will go home. We will not forget this evening, George. I thank God—yes, I thank God we have told each other. Now I shall feel, whatever happens, that I have been loved—even I, whose promised husband scorns me.' Her voice broke into a sob. 'But we must never, never again speak of it. Never, never. You have loved me for a little, and that is enough for me—to gladden all my life. Even I have been loved—even I——'

I made no reply, because I was fully resolved, you see, somehow to speak of it again. In fact, I felt that it was impossible to consider any other future than one in which the subject would always form the chief topic of conversation.

'Give me your promise, George,' she went on. 'Promise that you will never speak to me of love again.'

'I promise, Isabel, that I will never again speak to you of love until Robert himself has set you free. Will that do?'

How I proposed at that moment to persuade Robert I do not know. How I did actually and afterwards persuade him you shall presently learn.

CHAPTER XV.

MUTINY.

Then and there was the emancipation of Isabel begun. It was effected, you have seen, by making her physically strong and well, by giving her courage, by providing her with something to think about, and by relieving the monotony of her life.

'You've done wonders for the girl,' said the Captain one day. 'Wonders, you have. I don't hardly know her, she's so changed. Why, she sings now, and she plays her music half the day and every day. She that used to be such a shy and timid thing, afraid of her own voice. Perhaps, Sir George'—he would never abandon the title; it gave him a sense of self-importance to be talking with a Baronet—'perhaps you don't notice these trifles, but you must have seen the change that's come over the puddings.'

'No—really? Over the puddings?'

'There's a lightness about them, more jam, since the girl got brighter. Ah! It's quite natural. When the soul is heavy, the pudding comes out heavy too. There can't be the real feeling about the jam. And the teas are quite remarkable compared with what they were. There's a spiciness about the cake now.'

'Well, Captain, do you think that Robert has noticed any change?'

'No. He never notices anything. There's a change in him—and that's all he thinks about. What in thunder is the matter with the man to be engaged to a beautiful girl, and a nice girl too—isn't she, now?'

'A nice girl indeed!'

'And never to take the least notice, no more than if she wasn't there. I say, Sir George, it isn't natural. If he doesn't want her, why doesn't he tell her so? If he does, why not put it to her in the usual way?'

'Don't you think, Captain, that a word from you——'

'No, sir. He won't listen to one word, nor a thousand words, from anybody.'

'Consider, your daughter's happiness is at stake.

Can any girl like to go on year after year engaged to a man who treats her with absolute neglect and icy coldness? Is it fair to keep a girl going on in this way year after year? Could he not, at least, take back his promise and set her free? You are her father; it is for you to interfere.'

The Captain froze instantly. 'Perhaps, Sir George, under ordinary circumstances that might be so. But you forget that we have eaten Robert's bread and slept under his roof for five years, and you forget, besides, that he is the most masterful man in the world, and he means to have his own way.'

'Still, to marry a girl against her will——'

'How do I know that it is against her will? To be sure, she's a little afraid of him—many women are afraid of the man before they marry. Afterwards it's different, and let me tell you, sir, that most women like a man to be masterful. They get their own way fast enough; but they like him to be masterful.'

'Perhaps; but this neglect of Robert's——'

'Never mind that. He'll make it up when they do marry. It's all there, only bottled up. These bottles do pour it out when the time comes—in the most surprising manner. You'll see what an appreciative husband he'll make some day. Let things be, Sir George. You've brought her health and roses; Robert, who will be grateful when he notices it, will do all the rest. I dare say she frets and peaks a bit for want of the kissing and the fondling that all girls naturally expect. Let her have a little patience, I say. And don't let's disturb things when they are comfortable, especially the puddings.'

We spoke no more of love. We continued to go about together with free and unrestrained discourse.

As the evenings began to close in, we ceased the long journeys to villages and village churches, and took picture-galleries and concerts instead on Saturday afternoon. Or I remained in the evening at the house, while Isabel played and sang to me; she played much better already, and she sang with untrained sweetness. One evening, when the pianoforte was loaded with new music and new songs, and the books she was reading, she laid her hands upon them all.

'You have given me everything,' she said. 'But these things are only alleviations. The future is always before me—dark and horrible. Oh! I pray that it may be postponed so long as to become impossible. I shall grow old and ugly, and then I hope he will take back his promise.'

'Unless,' I said, 'he can be induced to take it back before.'

Then an incident took place which disquieted me very much indeed—a very dangerous incident. It was this:

Robert was in his study after dinner forging an oration. Isabel was in the parlour practising. On the table was a bundle of papers and certain blue-books. He took up the books and began to turn over the leaves, marking passages. He wanted these passages copied, to be used in his speech. He took paper and pen and began to copy. Then Isabel's playing reminded him of her. He got up, opened the door and called her.

She came obediently. That afternoon she was dressed in some light blue summer stuff with a ribbon and a flower, because she now loved a little touch of finery. The soft cheek, the depths of her eyes, her light, feathery hair, her ethereal look, might have moved the heart of St. Anthony. So far they had produced no impression at all upon her lover.

He nodded when she appeared—nodded pleasantly; he had a very fine speech nearly ready; he had learned it by heart; it was certain to carry the people away; he only wanted these extracts copied.

'Take these blue-books,' he said, with the old tone of command. 'You will find the pages marked with a red pencil. Copy out all the passages marked, and let me have them by to-morrow morning.'

'I am no longer your clerk, Robert.'

'What?'

'I say that I am no longer your clerk. You released me three months ago. Had I continued, I believe I should have been dead by this time. I will not copy passages for you.'

'Isabel!' He was amazed.

'Let us understand each other. I am your housekeeper. I will do for the house anything and everything. I am not your clerk or your private secretary or your accountant. You must get someone else to do that work for you.'

'Isabel!'

'I am grateful to you for taking us in and keeping us all these years. If you think I ought to do more for my father's maintenance and my own, I will give up and try for another place.'

'You are a fool, Isabel!' he said roughly.

'Very likely. Is it polite to tell me so? You have learned a great deal about the world of late; Robert—do you think it is polite to call the girl you are engaged to—a fool?'

'No, no, no! of course I didn't mean that. But—Isabel—what in the world has come over you?'

He actually saw the change at last, or something of the change; not all of it, otherwise the subsequent history would be different. It was the very first time that the girl had ever refused work, or objected, or complained. For four or five months there had been slowly going on under his eyes the transformation of which you have heard; but because it was so slow and gradual, and because he was always completely absorbed in himself, and because he had never thought it necessary to consider the appearance of the girl at all, having still in him so much of the working man as not to desire beauty in his wife, and not to think about it—he had observed nothing. Now, however, when the word of resistance and refusal opened his eyes, he was amazed to see standing before him, in the place of the mild, meek maiden, who humbly took whatever he gave, and humbly executed whatever he commanded, always with downcast eyes and hanging head, a lovely, airy, fairy creature, too dainty altogether for such a man as himself, a beautiful, bright, sunny girl, a head held upright, and steady eyes that met his own without the least fear or show of humility.

'Isabel!' he repeated, 'what in the name of wonder has come over you?'

'I don't know. You have been thinking about your own affairs, I suppose. But oh—it is nothing.' She turned to leave him, being, in fact, frightened at the admiration expressed in his eyes for the first time—it was quite a new expression, and it terrified her horribly.

'No, no; don't go, Isabel.' He leaned back in his chair. 'You are looking so wonderfully well, and—and pretty this afternoon.'

She began to tremble. Robert to say things complimentary!

'There is nothing more to say, is there?'

He leaned his chin in his left hand, and replied slowly: 'I remember now. George talked to me about you, Isabel, when he first came. He said you were overworked. I don't always remember, perhaps, that you are only a girl. I may have given you too much to do.'

'I am only housekeeper now.'

'Very well, then. I don't mean to be unkind, you see. But, of course, I can't be always thinking about your health and your whims, can I?'

'Of course not.'

'George said you wanted fresh air, and a change and exercise, and all kinds of fiddle-faddle stuff, and to see how other girls carry on—so as to take your proper place when I have advanced myself. Well, I told him I wished he would take care of you, and take you about a bit, seeing that I couldn't afford the time myself. Has he taken you about?'

'Yes; all the summer. He has been most kind and generous.'

'George is that sort of man, I believe, ready to waste any amount of time in dangling after a girl. Well, Isabel, as I could not dangle after you, I am very much obliged to him. And I must say that the change is wonderful. You look ever so much better. Your face, which used to be too pale, is full of colour, and your eyes are brighter, and—why, Isabel, give me your hands.'

He held out both hands, but Isabel made no response. And there was an unexpected look in his eyes which frightened her. He got up, not hastily, not like a passionate pilgrim, but slowly, and with the dignity of possession and authority. Isabel trembled as she realized this phenomenon. Between herself and the door stood Robert. She could not run away. She thought of crying for help—her father was in his own room—but a girl can hardly call out for protection against the threatened kiss of her engaged lover. And perhaps he didn't mean it, after all. Yet his eyes looked hungry.

In the corner beside the fireplace stood one of those revolving bookcases filled with books; a heavy thing which turns round when it is pushed with zeal and vigour. Isabel retreated behind this bookcase. 'Let me go!' she cried. 'Do not touch me!'

'I don't want to hurt you,' he said. 'Come out of that corner, Isabel. Why, you are not a baby; and you are my girl. Come out quietly, and don't be silly.'

'No—you promised—you said that there should be no—no——'

'Oh yes: stuff and nonsense! I said so, I dare say. I couldn't interrupt work and distract my thoughts with fondling and kissing. Not to be expected. Besides, that was a year ago and more, and you were not the girl then that you are now. Come, Isabel, don't be shy.'

'No, no, I won't have it! I couldn't bear it. Oh, horrible! Let me go!' She gave the bookcase a vigorous shove, and it revolved ponderously with its weight of a hundred books. Robert fell back.

It is not pleasant for one's sweetheart to speak of a threatened kiss as horrible. His face grew dark.

'You are going to marry me, Isabel, I believe?'

'Not yet—not for a long time yet; not till you are an Archbishop of Canterbury, or something. And until we do marry, Robert, I will take you at your word. There shall be no fondling, as you call it.'

'When you marry me you will have to obey me. There can only be one master in one house.'

'I am not your wife yet, remember. I am not at your orders except as your housekeeper. Pray do not imagine that you have any right to command a woman because she has promised to be your wife. After I am your wife—if ever I am——'

He wavered. 'Of course,' he said, 'I cannot command your obedience so long as you are not my wife. But come out from that retreat, and sit down and let us talk. I will not attempt to command you in anything. Perhaps we need not wait so long as first we thought. Perhaps—as soon as I am in the House——'

'No,' she replied; 'you must promise to let me go, or I will stay behind this bookcase all night.'

'You can go then, Isabel,' he replied, flinging himself into his chair; 'I will not stop you.'

She passed out without a word. But she was shaken; she went to her own room and sat down to think. Was Robert, too, changing? Was his ancient indifference turning into admiration? and though her experience of the manly heart was small, she felt by instinct that admiration might at any moment leap into passion, and passion into a demand for the fulfilment of her promise. 'Oh,' she groaned and cried, 'I cannot marry him—I cannot—I cannot—I would rather die!'

But she told no one, not even her physician. And that evening the furrow reappeared on her brow, and the cloud on her face, and Robert, coming in to tea, saw again the maiden meek and mild, and wondered what had become of the princess, and why he had experienced, if only for a brief moment, that novel and singular feeling of admiration.

'George,' said Robert after tea, when we were alone, 'women are queer skittish creatures. There's Isabel, now.'

'Yes; there is Isabel.'

'Formerly I had only to lift my little finger and she ran. She'd do just as much work as I pleased to order. To-day she flatly refused to do anything.'

'Quite right.'

'And when I told her—a man may surely say as much to his own girl—that she was changed and improved—which she certainly is, thanks to you—she wanted to run away.'

'Did she?'

'And when I offered to kiss her—a man may surely kiss his own girl—she shrieked out and ran behind the revolving bookcase.'

'Oh, did she? But, I say, Robert, hadn't you promised that there was to be no kissing, and fondling, and stuff?'

'Well—well—I had, I dare say. But who wanted to kiss the girl a year ago? It's different now. She's become an amazingly pretty girl. If it wasn't for this election business I would—I certainly would——'

'Better not,' I said solemnly. 'Much better not—yet.'

And now you understand how disquieting this incident was.

CHAPTER XVI.

DISSOLUTION.

WHAT might have happened after this act of open rebellion I do not know. Perhaps these terrifying overtures were the first signs of a real but as yet unconscious passion, just called into existence by some unexpected charm of a girl whose charms he had never understood. Certain I am that a man so complete in all his faculties could not lack the universal faculty of love; it is only dullards who are cold to Venus. The greatest men have always been the most open to the charms of women; subsequent events proved so much at least in Robert's case. Equally certain it is that had this sleeping lover been awakened completely, he would have paid small attention to any obstacle or resistance offered by his mistress. She would have been ordered to put on a white frock, and she would have been dragged to the altar. The bells would have rung once more at the parish church of Wapping for the wedding of another Burnikel, a boat-builder, like his ancestors. Providence interposed to avert this calamity, and, in order to make it impossible, provided earthquakes and convulsions. Proud indeed should that maiden be, for whom, in order to prevent her own unhappy marriage, the whole nation should be thrown into agitation.

It came the very next morning—the day after this lovers' quarrel. The thing happened which Robert had been expecting so long. You all remember how everybody said it was coming—coming—coming. And it came not. The Government, with its narrow majority, still hung on; it still discussed and passed Bills. All the papers on one side declared that the Dissolution must come; they said it must come in a month—a week—the day after to-morrow at latest. How could a Cabinet go on with their absurd little majority? The papers on the other side declared that the Government could go on for ever if they pleased, even with a majority of one; but their confidence was weakened by the rumours published in the same columns, and by the reports of movements, the appearance of candidates, and the active work already beginning among the constituencies. And the by-elections, one after the other, were going against the Government. And outsiders like Robert daily saw more reason for believing that there must be, before long, an appeal to the country. But still the Government continued. Then, lo! the thing came—and it seemed to burst upon the world as quite an unexpected thing. We received it as if we had no idea of its possibility.

Robert took his paper, like most of us, as a part of his breakfast. This morning he opened it with less eagerness than usual, because his mind was disturbed by that little rebellion in the study. He was uncertain, I believe, how to comport himself with the culprit, who now sat opposite him with looks still mutinous. But the thing that he read in the forefront of the paper drove all other thoughts out of his head. And so far as concerned Isabel, they never came back again, as you shall hear, if you have patience. There it was, in big letters, DISSOLUTION.

He read the announcement, and the lines that followed, first swiftly, as one always reads things that are surprising. The plain, bald intelligence of an event can be mastered in a moment. The bearings and meanings and possibilities and certainties and doubtfulnesses of the event take a second and a third reading for fuller comprehension. It is a strange power, that of reading a whole column of news in one glance down a column. We all have it in moments of excitement. The first time, then, that Robert read the news he grasped it all at that one glance; the second time and the third time he read it more slowly, turning over in his mind at the same moment the possible relation of the Dissolution of Parliament to himself.

Nothing national has ever much affected me, nor is it likely to affect me now, unless it makes the price of materials prohibitory.

Then he laid down the paper, and gazed across the table at Isabel, who was still under the terror of yesterday, and feared new developments. There was no cause for any such anxiety.

'It has come,' he said solemnly. And then she knew that she was safe for the moment, because she divined what had happened.

'What has come?' asked the Captain, astonished, looking up from his plate of bacon.

'What I have been looking for, what is going to make my fortune—the General Election—has come. That's all. Only the General Election! At last!' he sighed. Then he threw the paper across the table. 'You can have it,' he said. 'Anyone can have it. There's no more news in it so far as I care. The dissolution of Parliament! There's news enough for me—quite enough.'

He swallowed his tea, and retreated to his own den without more words.

'Oh,' said the Captain thoughtfully, 'it's a General Election, is it? Then, they'll have an election at Shadwell, I suppose. Ah! and Robert will get in. They all tell me he'll get in. And they say he'll work wonders when he does get in. Very likely. I don't know much about these things, Isabel, but I've lived for sixty-five years, and they've been looking for wonders all the time, it seems to me. When I used to come home—which was once in five years or so—I used to say. "Well, what are you doing—looking for wonders?" That's what they always confessed that they were looking after. And the wonders never came, and, what was more wonderful, we got on quite as well without them. One after the other I remember them all. There was Palmerston and Johnny Russell, and John Bright and

Gladstone, and Bradlaugh and Balfour — but the wonders never came. Next it's going to be Burnikel, if he's lucky and can make 'em believe in him. Well, well, Burnikel and Wonders! Robert's as good as any of 'em, you'll see. Give me some more tea, my dear.'

'Since Robert wants to get into the House, I hope he will. I don't understand why he should want it.'

'I hope so, too. Because you see, Isabel, since we are alone—it's a delicate subject to talk about; but, as I say, since we are alone'—the Captain approached the subject with some difficulty—'we may talk a bit about what we can't talk about very well either with George or Robert.'

'What is it, father?'

'Well, my dear, it's about this engagement of yours. I confess I don't like the way it's going on—there!'

'Oh, don't vex yourself, father, about my engagement. You can do no good by interfering.'

'I don't want to interfere, but I don't like it, I say. Robert a lover? Why, he takes no more notice of you than if you were a log.'

'Never mind, father; it is his way.'

'And you the prettiest girl, though I say it, within a mile all round—that is, the prettiest girl since George came and put a little colour into your cheeks, and made you sit upright. Why, you are not the same girl. I shouldn't know you again. You are twice the girl you were. George has done it all—and all for Robert. And Robert sees nothing.'

'It is his way, father,' she repeated.

'George don't like it, either. He told me as much. He wants me to break it off, and let Robert go free. Says Robert ought to cruise about in search of an animated iceberg in petticoats, who would suit him. Nothing short of an iceberg would suit him, that's certain.'

'Pray do not say or do anything, father, I implore you. Remember what we owe to Robert. The least we can do in such a matter as this is to respect his wishes. If he wants to put off his marriage, he must.'

'I do remember, child. I wish I could forget,' said the Captain gloomily. 'I live upon his bounty.'

'Never by word, or by action, or by look, has he made us feel it, father.'

'I'll be as grateful as you please, my dear; though somehow gratitude isn't one of the feelings which make a man cheerful. It's a gloomy kind of dish to eat, is gratitude. Come back to the engagement. You've been engaged for four or five years—since you were seventeen, and now you are twenty-one. Have you any reason to believe the time is coming?'

'I don't know,' said Isabel. 'He has said nothing.'

'Four years is a terrible long time for a young man to wait. It isn't natural for a young man to wait so long. Do you suppose I would have waited four years?' The Captain laughed. 'Four days was nearer the mark. Isabel, do you suppose there's—there's someone else—up the back-stairs—some other girl—another wife in another port?'

'If Robert was in love with some other girl he would very soon make an end of my engagement,' said Isabel.

The Captain shook his head dubiously, as one loaded with sad experiences, but refrained from pursuing that branch of the subject.

'To be sure,' he went on. 'Robert's a bookish man; he reads a good deal, reads something every day. It's the only use many of them get of their eyes. But even the readingest of young fellows can't be always thinking about his books. Then he speechifies a good deal—makes 'em up, learns 'em, and fires 'em off; but a young fellow can't be always thinking about his speechifying. Mostly the young fellows of the present day are like those of my day. They are fond of a song and glass, and they like to shake a leg now and again, and to kiss a pretty woman.'

'Robert is not one of that kind. He never wants either a song or a glass. And as for shaking a leg—oh!'

'But to wait for four years—four long years. To go on waiting as if he liked it. It sticks in the gizzard, my dear.'

'I am in no hurry, please.'

'I'm not thinking about you, my dear. No one expects you to be in a hurry. I'm thinking about him. A woman always likes courtship better than matrimony.'

'I know as little of one as of the other,' said Isabel.

'Yes, my dear, and it's a shame and a wonder. What is the man made of? That's what puzzles me. Well—but now—when Robert gets into the House of Commons, which I've always understood that he desired, I suppose his ambition will be satisfied, and the thing will come off.'

'I am in no hurry,' said Isabel. 'And I do not know—and I shall not ask him.'

'Hang it! 'tis the man's part—the man's part, my dear—to be in a hurry. So, I say, we may expect——'

'Do not expect anything, father. Let us go on in silence. I am to marry Robert when he is willing. Till then I wait.'

'It was to come off, he told me, when he had done something or other. Well, a man can't be engaged for ever. The election, I expect, was what he meant.'

The Captain took up the paper again and read the leading article in the paper twice over, slowly.

'There is no doubt, I suppose,' he said, 'though the papers do reel off lies every day, that they have got the right end of the stick this time. There will be a General Election, and Robert will get in, and——'

'Father, do you suppose he really meant the Election?'

'What more could he mean? And, as I said before, no man likes to go on being engaged for ever. Wedding-bells will be ringing, Isabel—wedding-bells, my dear.'

She rose and fled.

When I arrived at ten o'clock, Robert was still in his study, pacing the room in uncontrollable agitation. 'The time has come!' he cried. 'It has come! My chance has come. I feel as if it was my only chance.'

'I congratulate you, Robert. As for your only chance, that is rubbish. You are only twenty-six at the present moment. Applying the arithmetical method, you may stand for nine Parliaments yet; probably there will be many more chances between this and your seventieth birthday.'

'No, no. It could not be the same thing. I've thrown all my hopes, all my powers of persuasion and argument, into this election. I could never again be so fresh and so strong, or work so hard. I must succeed this time. I am carrying the men away against their convictions—if they've any—I am making them follow me. That means work.'

'All right. You shall get in. I know nothing whatever about the matter, because I never assisted at an election before; but here I am; take me; take all my time; I will live here, if you like; I will look after the yard for you. I have heard of Nottingham lambs being wanted. I will become a lamb. Platforms are sometimes rushed and candidates hustled off. I will get up a stalwart party of hustlers, if you like. Candidates are heckled out of their five senses. I will become a heckler of the most venomous kind for your opponents. I can't write epigrams and verses, because that part of my education has been neglected. But here I am, Robert—one man, at least, at your service.'

'Thanks, a thousand times. You shall join my committee, to begin with. I must make haste to get my committee together; they shall all be working men except you. I must sit down to prepare an address. I shall have to arrange for an address somewhere or other every night till polling-day. It's going to be a splendid time—a magnificent time. By ——' He swore a great oath, for the first time in his life. 'My chance has come—my chance has come!'

His voice softened; he sank into his chair and leaned his head upon his hand. Robert was, for the moment, overcome. The spectacle of this emotion pleased me. I suppose no one likes to think of a man as altogether composed of cast-iron. When any ordinary human being sees the thing for which all his life long he has worked and longed actually within his reach, that ordinary or average human being is generally a little overcome. Remember that in this case ambition had devoured nearly all other passions. The man had had no youth; none of the delightful freaks, fredaines and frolics of youth could be recorded of this young man; the unfortunate Robert had never kissed a girl to his subsequent confusion; nor scoured the streets; nor painted Wapping red; nor passed his midnights over cups; he had worked and trained himself for this end and none other. He would have been more than human had he shown no sense of the crisis or juncture of events.

While he sat there, head in hand, Isabel stole in softly like a ghost, and stood beside his chair. I made as if I would go, but she motioned me to stay. By the two red spots in her cheeks I was made aware that something decisive would be said.

He seemed not to observe her presence. She touched his shoulder. 'Robert!'

'Isabel!' He started, and sat up, with a quick frown of irritation.

'I have come to congratulate you, Robert,' she said timidly.

'Yes, thank you, Isabel. Thank you. Don't say any more.'

'When the General Election is over, you will have done what you proposed to do, I suppose. I thought it would be years first. Your ambition, I mean, will be achieved.'

'Achieved? Why, Isabel, you understand nothing. That is only a beginning.'

'Oh! Only a beginning?' She looked rather bewildered.

'Why, what else should it be? No one would want to be a member of Parliament only for the pride of it, I suppose.'

'Oh! I thought——'

'Look here, Isabel, I'm glad you came in. After the little misunderstanding of yesterday, it's as well to have a talk. You won't mind George; he knows all about it. Sit down there.' Such was the improvement in his manners that he actually got up and placed a chair for her. As for me, I retired to the seat in the window, not proposing to interrupt the conversation.

'I will just tell you exactly what is the meaning of the situation. I have told no one—no one except

George, so far. I didn't tell you, because you wouldn't understand. It isn't in your way to see. You've changed a bit since you took to going about with George'—there was not a touch of jealousy in his mind —'straightened yourself, and filled out and improved so, that I hardly know you any more. You're bigger than you were, Isabel—I like a woman to look strong —but, still, I don't think you can quite understand.'

'I should be glad to hear all your proposals, Robert.'

'I am astonished now to think of it, how I dared, in my inexperience and ignorance, to form such an ambition. If I had known, six months ago, what the thing meant, I should have been afraid.'

'No,' said Isabel; 'nothing would ever make you afraid.'

'You think so, Isabel? Perhaps. In a general way I am not a coward.'

'I suppose you want to do something great in the House of Commons?'

'Put it that way if you please. I will give you details and particulars.'

Isabel sat facing him. There was no look of passion or admiration on his face. The hungry look had left his eyes, which were now filled with the eagerness of the coming struggle. There was nothing to fear from him. Indeed, at such a moment as this it is not of love that a man can be expected to think: he may most lawfully and laudably think of nothing but himself, even before Helen of Troy herself. But I thought, looking at the two of them, What a strange pair of lovers! The man who had never said a kind word—the girl who looked forward to her marriage with terror!

'Now, Isabel,' he said, 'I will tell you. I am going to enter the House as a plain Master Craftsman, not a gentleman, except that I know their tricks and phrases —I shall be a man experienced in industrial questions and in everything concerned with work practical and theoretical. They want such a man badly. I am going in as an Independent Member, like John Bright. When I have made my mark in the House, and am a power in it, as John Bright was, I shall perhaps join a party in order to enter the Cabinet. And not till then. And perhaps not at all. As for being one of the rank and file, saying what one is told to say, put up to defend the incompetence and the blundering of the commanders, calling the Irish members, for instance, all the names under the sun one day, and all the opposite names the next day, just to catch votes—to be everything and all things for votes—votes—more votes—I won't do it. That kind of work will not do for me.'

'Well?' Either Isabel did not understand the point, or else it had no interest for her. She looked unconcerned, and spoke coldly.

'I told George at the outset. I called upon him on purpose to tell him all this when he was a stranger, and he managed to fall in with it as soon as he saw that I meant business. At the first go-off he thought I was a conceited windbag—one of the ignorant lot turned out by every local Parliament. I could see very well what he thought. When he saw that I was a determined kind of chap he fell in with it, I say, and helped me all he could.'

'Yes?' Isabel showed no manner of interest in this revelation of political ambition.

'And thought about this and about that thing wanted. Oh, the essentials of the thing were all right —the knowledge, and the appearance, and the power of speech; but there was one thing wanting. I had never thought of such an omission, and without him I could never have repaired that omission. I'm not ashamed to say, not as things have gone, that what I wanted was manners.'

'Manners!' cried Isabel, showing interest at this point. 'You to want manners!'

'Just what I said myself. But George was right. There's a thousand little ways in which the fellows at the West End are different from us. They are mostly tricks invented to show that they are a superior race. I've learned these tricks, and now, I believe, I can pretend to be a gentleman.'

'You never were anything else.'

'There are gentlemen and gentlemen, Isabel. Have you noticed any change in me?'

'Well, Robert,' she replied timidly, 'I have thought that you were gentler.'

'Of course. One of the things is to repress yourself, and pretend not to care. That's what you call being gentle.'

'Oh, but to learn manners!' said Isabel.

'I would do a great deal more than that for the sake of getting on. Well, now you know what we did when I went away with George every evening.'

'And when you get on in the House?' She returned to the main point.

'I say that, when I have made my mark, I may take office; but I don't know quite what I shall do. It may be best to stay outside.'

'Best, you mean, for your power or for your reputation?'

'For both.'

'Power is what you desire more than anything else in the world, Robert. You have always desired it.'

'Always. There is nothing in the world worth having compared with power, Isabel. I want to be a leader—nothing less than that—mind—is my ambition. I understand now how it must seem to other people a wild and presumptuous dream for a man in my position. I don't care a straw what it seems. I realize how great a thing it is, and I am just all the more confirmed in my resolution.'

'And when you are a leader!' It was quite impossible to make Isabel understand the audacity of this ambition. She thought that Robert would simply stand upon the floor of the House of Commons in order to receive the distinctions that would be showered upon him; that everybody would immediately begin to offer him posts of honour, because he was so strong and masterful a man.

'Well, one thing, Isabel: as soon as I am in the Cabinet—say Home Secretary—my first ambition will be achieved. Then, as regards a certain promise——'

'How long,' she interrupted quickly, 'do you think it will take before you arrive so far?'

'No one can say. A party gets turned out or keeps in. At the quickest time possible for a new man to work his way and be recognised, and put over the heads of other men, one can't very well expect such success in less than five years.'

'It can only be done in five years,' I interposed for the first time, 'under the most favourable circumstances possible—if the present Government gets returned again, if it stays in five years, if you meet with immediate success, if vacancies occur among the chiefs, if you are able to serve in some subordinate capacity. If I were you, Robert, I should say ten years.'

'Well; in ten years,' he replied cheerfully. 'A year or two is neither here nor there if a man is advancing all the time.'

'And a woman is waiting,' I added.

'Ten years!' said Isabel. 'But your side may get turned out.'

'They may; then it might be longer. Of course, if a man once becomes a power in the House, he becomes also a power in the country. His influence may go on increasing.'

'Ten years! That is a very long time. There will be many changes in ten years.'

'Changes? I dare say—I dare say. I hope so. I shall make some changes myself.'

'Changes in your own mind, Robert.'

He saw what she meant. 'I think not, Isabel. A promise is a promise. When my word is passed the thing is as good as done.'

She got up. 'I won't waste your time any longer, Robert. I am glad to hear what your ambitions really mean. It was about that—promise—that I came to see you. I thought the time was come when you might want to fulfil that promise.'

'Not yet, Isabel.'

'Not yet. I came to set you free, if you wished to be set free.'

'To set me free?'

'Because a man like you should not be hampered by an engagement, especially with a woman whom—I mean—you ought to be free. So, Robert, I do set you free—if you desire it.'

'What makes you think that I desire it, Isabel? I don't desire it.'

'That is because you don't know other women. So, Robert, it shall be always and at any time as you desire. We owe so much to you that this is due to you in return. I will wait for the fulfilment of that promise for ten years, twenty years, all my life, if you please. I will cheerfully set you free whenever you desire to be released. That is all, Robert.'

'Why,' said Robert, 'there spoke a good and reasonable girl. But you've given me quite as much in work as I've given you in board and lodging. You owe me nothing. As for being released, ask me if I want to be released when I am the Right Honourable Robert Burnikel, Secretary of State for India. And now let's make an end of thanksgivings and explainings, and get to business; there's lots of work before us.'

'Let me help you, Robert. My shorthand and typewriting ought to be of some use to you.'

'I wouldn't ask you, Isabel; but you can be of the greatest use. I take it very kindly of you after yesterday.' He held out his hand in token of forgiveness. Isabel accepted it, smiling graciously. 'I do indeed, Isabel, after yesterday's little misunderstanding.' He held her hand and looked her straight in the face; and not one touch of softening in his eyes, not the slightest look of love.

It was just what I expected of Isabel. She offered Robert his release if he would take it; if he would not, she remained bound to him for life, if need be, by promise. A barren and a hopeless engagement, miserable in either event—fulfilment or waiting. And for myself—— But just then was not a moment propitious for thinking of one's own broken eggs and shattered crockery. Besides, I was always quite sure that there would be a way out of it.

Then Isabel took her old place as shorthand clerk, and Robert walked about his room dictating to her and talking to me. I understood for the first time how a man may come to regard a woman as a mere mechanical contrivance for working purposes. He spoke to Isabel, once more his clerk, as if she were a senseless log. He ordered her to write this, to write that. I think that I could never bring myself to forget the sex or the humanity of a girl clerk.

That day, the first of many busy days, we arranged a great many things. During the dinner-hour we adjourned to the Yard, and turned that into a reception-room for the working men, who came in crowds. We arranged for addresses; we got together our committee; we opened our headquarters; we prepared our address to the constituents; we wrote our placards and our handbills; we started our election cries; in a word, we lost no time. And in order to be on the spot, I took up my residence in the house, being assigned the old four-poster of the ancient John Burnikel, Master Mariner.

'My career is beginning,' said Robert at eleven o'clock, after the first great speech had been delivered —'it is beginning. Well, I am not afraid—I am not in the least afraid. The House of Commons is no more difficult to move than the music-hall of Shadwell. There's only one way to move any class of hearers: you must first talk to interest them; that's grip. I've got the grip of a bull-dog. Then you must talk to make 'em cry. I can make 'em cry.'

'If you make the House of Commons cry,' I said, 'they'll shove you up into the House of Lords.'

'And you must be able to make 'em laugh. I can make 'em laugh.'

'If you can make the House of Commons laugh, Robert, they'll never let you go up to the other House at all.'

CHAPTER XVII.

GENERAL ELECTION.

Despite the changes, suppressions, repressions, and new conditions which have been imposed upon the good old election, there is still some excitement left. We may sigh and pine for the brave days when an election lasted six weeks; when everybody marched up valiantly though clubs were shaken in his face and might be broken over his head, and gave his vote openly before all the world; when the people who had no vote contributed their share in the representation of the country by free fights, hustling and belabouring the voters; when drink flowed as freely as when Wat Tyler held the city; when everybody had to take a side, and behaved accordingly; when the chairmen brought their poles, and the sailors brought their clubs, and the butchers brought their marrow-bones and cleavers—and all for use, and not for fashionable display; when none thought shame to take a bribe; when the air was thick with showers of epigrams, libels, and scurrilous accusations; when the Father of Lies held his headquarters, for the time, in the borough; when the whole of a man's record was exposed to view, with trimmings and additions, and the most ingenious and diabolic perversions of the truth; when the public-houses were open to all electors free, and beer and gin and rum were attainable by the humblest; when every elector knew his value, and proudly appraised himself to its full extent; when the candidates stood upon the hustings courageously facing showers of dead cats, putrid rabbits, addled eggs, and cabbage-stalks—about a fortnight before an election all the cats in the country died, and all the dead rabbits became putrid, and all the eggs were addled, and all the cabbage-stalks went rotten. Thus doth Nature accommodate herself to the ways of man. Those of us who read of the good old days may pine for them; those who have not read of them will find little at the present day to remind them of former customs.

At Shadwell there were none of these things. A fight there was, but only one. None of the ancient customs were observed; only those humours of an election which still survive were with us; and these are mild.

It was an active time for those who, like me, went electioneering. The papers spoke of nothing else; certainly at our house no one talked of anything else. I suppose that something went on as usual in the yard; but no one heeded the building of boats. Everybody told everybody else that business was completely stopped. That may be. In the High Street, however, the cranes on the third-floors of the warehouses continued their activity, and the waggons full and empty rumbled along the street. They didn't mind the General Election, and the ships went in and out of the docks without minding the General Election in the least. Also the working men went backwards and forwards. And they didn't seem to mind the General Election in the least. Everybody said, however, that the world thought of nothing else. We made our own racket, I suppose, and thought that all the world was joining in.

And we worked—heavens! how we worked! Of course we were Robert's servants—his slaves, even. He issued commands. At his committee he did not consult his friends; he commanded them. And, of course, everybody obeyed. He ordered me to speak for him in the less eligible districts, and when he was speaking elsewhere. Well, I, who had never before spoken, obediently went to speak. I prepared speeches: I found freedom of speech. I even arrived at some popularity. 'We'd send you to Parliament,' they told me, 'if it wasn't for your cousin.' I harangued on Robert's lines, as zealously as a Party man who hopes for office; I pulled the enemy's addresses and manifestoes to pieces; I showed their abominable inconsistency; their delusive promises; their wicked self-seeking; their shameful ambitions. Oh, the wickedness and the foolishness of the other side! The world will never be righteous, mind you, or generous, or just, till the other side gives up its self-seeking and its pretences. And then I canvassed—yes! I walked through all the streets of Shadwell Borough: they are mostly streets with a full-flavoured fragrance hanging about them—the frying of fish in oil is an industry much practised; I solicited the votes of all the voters; I was received with contumely and with sarcasms, and even with open abuse, in some parts, and with a free hospitality in other parts which was almost worse than the abuse. I also manufactured some lampoons which I thought were rather effective. I sent them to Frances, who told me that I ought to be standing in my cousin's place and doing all this work for myself. She was good enough, however, to express a hope that so strong a speaker and so vigorous a speaker as myself might get into the House, where, she added, he would very quickly find his own level.

Robert's committee was composed almost entirely of working men. The employers and shopkeepers, and a good many of the working men, understood two things only, Liberal or Conservative. Politics must mean one thing or the other. That a candidate should be neither

Liberal nor Conservative, but only himself, they could not understand.

There is no local press at Shadwell, but the London papers, when they spoke of our election prospects, ignored Robert as a mere outsider. The seat, of course, was for the Liberal candidate, or for the Conservative, one or the other. No one knew, or guessed, what Robert had done in the borough by his three months' course of speeches and lectures. The newspapers spoke of him as merely a local man without local influence. He was called a Socialist, being an Individualist of the deepest dye, and a demagogue, being a man who sought to teach the people, but not to flatter them. It was said that he had no importance except that he would take away a few votes from this side or that. The newspapers understood nothing about it, as you shall see.

Before many days were over, I was as much absorbed in the election as Robert himself. I lived altogether at Wapping. We began work early in the morning, at seven, and we ended it at midnight. The committee sat all day long; that is to say, the only man among them who was not a working man—myself—sat all day long. We issued our candidate's address, which was a bold appeal for election on the ground of knowledge and personal fitness. As for burning questions, we dismissed them. Abolition of the Lords? Not possible. What was the use of discussing for election purposes a question not yet within the reach of the Commons? The Disestablishment of the Church? Whether that would do any good to the people of the country or not was an open question. Meantime, was the measure even possible at the present moment? No. Then why consider it? Was there to be an Eight Hours Bill? Then there would have to be an eight hours' pay, with reductions, otherwise the employer would be ruined. And so on. Our independent candidate would promise nothing, except the support of such measures as he himself, exercising his own judgment, might think calculated to advance the whole community. He said that he would vote for no interest; that he would not needlessly disturb existing institutions; that old things, grown up in the course of centuries, meant things befitting the mind of the people, and so far should be respected. He offered himself as a man who knew things. He reminded the electors that they had heard his addresses, and had learned his views. If they approved of him and his opinions, they would send him to Parliament, where they would find him able, at least, to set the House right on a good many matters of fact. 'I am not,' he said, 'and never shall be, a Socialist. Any attempt to destroy the Individual must inevitably fail, because all work—every enterprise—every invention—every advance—is caused by the individual acting for himself at the right moment, and not by the Society, which can never act at all. But I want every way open to the man who has the ability and the courage to rise. And I would have the relations of employer and workman to rest upon some method recognised and adopted by both sides. I shall always speak, and vote, on the side of the working man, though I am an employer, until such an understanding has been arrived at. My dream of society is of such an organization as will provide order and liberty for every man to work as he can, and protect him against tyranny; which will give every man such a wage as the conditions of his trade allow; which will leave the door wide open for all who are strong enough to pass through and to climb up.'

When one contrasted this address, strong and manly

—we called it—with the conventional phrases—we called them conventional—of the other candidates, it seemed marvellous—to ourselves—that anyone should vote for them at all.

Every evening the canvassers went round and brought back their sheaves of promises with them; every day it became more and more certain that we had the people with us. At the end there was no doubt possible. But the other candidates still believed in the 'merely local' theory, and they spoke of him with scorn as the working man's candidate.

Every evening for four weeks Robert spoke. On Sundays he spoke at the working men's clubs, in their own club-houses; on Mondays he spoke in such halls and big rooms as can be got in this neighbourhood. It was one evening just before the polling that the fight happened which has been mentioned above.

We were in the same music-hall to which I had brought Frances on a certain memorable occasion. Robert would still have no chairman or committee-men on the platform. He stood alone; with some of the committee I was in the stage-box. Now I observed, when we took our places, a lot of fellows whose faces were unfamiliar to me—yet by this time I knew all Shadwell; they were standing gathered together in the orchestra. They talked to each other, and nodded their heads, and stuck elbows in each other, with a good deal of earnestness, as if they designed something; they all carried sticks; and they looked inclined for mischief. Well, at election time there is still something left of the old leaven. It looked to me as if they meant to rush the platform. Robert would be alone there; if these fellows should try to rush it, how would he defend it by himself? I mentioned my suspicions—we resolved to jump down to the stage if there should be any need.

Well, our candidate came on: he was received with a storm of applause; but the men in the orchestra did not applaud: they only whispered and nudged each other. Robert began his address. The company in the orchestra continued to whisper; they did not pretend to listen. After the speaker had gone on for a few minutes the house became perfectly silent, carried away by the current of the speech flowing full and strong and clear. The voice of the man was magnetic; it would be heard; it recommended silence. Then suddenly one man blew a whistle. Instantly the men in the orchestra at either end climbed up on the platform, shouting and brandishing their sticks.

The whole house rose, crying 'Down! down! Off! off!' And then followed the finest display of physical strength and bravery that I have ever seen. There were at least a dozen of them, equally divided. Robert seized the chair beside him, and with this for weapon he fell upon the party on the right, and literally broke the chair to pieces over their heads. We might have leaped down and joined him, but there was no need; the battle was over as soon as it was begun; the assailants fell back one over the other; their heads were broken, their teeth were knocked out, their collar-bones were broken. Robert wielded his chair with the lightning-like dexterity of a skilful player in the olden time who wielded his quarter-staff. It seemed but a moment before the fellows of the right-hand party were down again, broken to pieces, with no more courage for the fray. Robert kicked the last of them over the footlights into the orchestra. He then turned to the second party. But they had seen enough; they were now tumbling over each other to the place whence they came in much greater haste than they had shown to mount the stage. Then Robert stood alone. A streak of blood lay on his white shirt-front: it came from his lip, which was cut, but not badly; his table was upset, his water-decanter broken, his chair lay about in fragments. And then, oh! I have never heard such a splendid tumult of applause. From every throat it came; from every man and woman present there arose such a storm and rolling, roaring, continuous thunder of applause as I have never heard before or since. Who is there among us that does not rejoice to see an act of bravery and strength? One man against a dozen, and where were all the rest? Again—again—again—will it never stop?

A hand was laid upon my shoulder. I turned quickly. It was Frances.

'I came to hear your orator again,' she whispered; 'but I have seen him as well. George, it was splendid! Oh, the great, strong, brave creature! He must get in—he must!'

Then Robert, advancing to the front, held up his hand for silence, for the people, having tasted blood, wanted more fighting, and were now roaring for the disturbers of the peace to be thrown to the lions; and the ill-advised rushers, caught in a trap of their own making, were looking at each other with rueful countenance, expectant of a troublous five minutes. Imagine the Christian martyrs going to be let out into an arena full of lions, all hungry. And these poor fellows had not, it was clear, the support of faith. They had been paid to make a row and break up the meeting, and now it looked as if they had achieved martyrdom.

Silence obtained, Robert pointed to the orchestra below him. ‘I think,’ he said, ‘that before we go on, these gentlemen had better be removed. If they do not go quietly, I will go down among them myself with all that is left of the chair. In taking them out, remember that there are, perhaps, a few ribs and collar-bones broken. Please not to kick the men with the broken bones down the stairs!’

The house roared with joy; the men jumped up and poured to the front. They summoned the rushers to come out of that, or—they promised truly dreadful things as an alternative. But these misguided young men surrendered; they climbed ruefully over the pew. As each descended he was escorted between two of our fellows to the stairs, and then, one had reason to believe, he was assisted down those stairs by strange boots. The unfortunates on whose skulls and ribs the chair had been broken came last, all the conceit out of them, with hanging heads, and the exhibition of pocket-handkerchiefs. They were received with cheers derisive.

‘And now,’ said Robert, when they were gone, ‘let us go back to business.’

And I really believe, so great is the admiration of the crowd for personal bravery and a man who can fight, that this little adventure brought him as many votes as all his speeches. For once the people were presented with evidence conclusive that they really had a very strong man before them.

‘I am glad I came,’ said Frances, when the meeting was over. ‘I never saw a brave man before. Oh, what a thing it must be to be a man! And you go and throw it all away. Take me down now. My carriage is waiting by the door, I believe.’

I led her down the stairs, in the splendid dress which was always part of her, through the people, who made way for her right and left—the poor women with their pinched and shabby shawls, and the working men in their working dress.

'You people all,' she said, standing at the top of the staircase, 'I have heard a splendid address to-night, and I have seen a splendid thing. If you don't send that splendid speaker and that splendid man to the House of Commons, you deserve to be disfranchised.'

'Don't be frightened, lady,' said one of the men, whom I knew to be a rank Socialist; 'we'll send him there fast enough, especially if you'll come here and speak for him.'

So she got into the carriage and drove off, while the crowd shouted after her.

And this was the nearest approach to the old-fashioned humours of an election that we had to show.

When the day of polling arrived we had no carriages. Robert would not pay for any, and no one offered to lend him any. The carriages of Liberal and Conservative ran about all day long, but our voters had to walk. In the evening they came by companies, among them all the costers of the quarter with their barrows. What made the costers vote for Robert, if it was not that very noble battle on the stage?

And when the votes were counted, Robert was head of the poll by 754 votes.

So he had got the desire of his heart, and was a Member of Parliament. He had worked for it for seven years; he had even descended so far as to learn manners, which was at first a very bitter pill. He had trained his voice, and taught himself the art of oratory; he had studied economics of all kinds; he was patient, courageous, tenacious, and he was ambitious. What would he do after all this preparation?

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE HOUSE.

Then followed the meeting of the newly-elected Commons. Our own member went off with a quiet air of self-reliance, not arrogance. 'I am not in the least afraid of my own powers,' he repeated. 'I have tried and proved them. I shall speak to the House first, and to the country next.'

'Don't be in a hurry to begin, Robert.'

'Certainly not. I shall wait until a question arises on which I can speak with authority. And I shall not speak often. My first ambition is that, when I do rise, the House may look for a solid contribution, not for talk. Let me be considered as a man who knows. Don't think that I shall throw away my chances by chatter.'

'We shall look out eagerly.'

'You will, I believe.' There was just a little touch of disappointment in his voice. 'You will; Isabel will not. She cares nothing about it. I suppose that women never understand ambitions or politics.'

'Some women do.' I thought of Frances, who understood nothing else.

'I wish I knew them, then. Not that it matters. Men don't want the sympathy of women in their work; we want power and authority. All a woman wants is comfort, and to sit by the fire. If you had had a woman for a shorthand clerk, as I have, your opinion of the feminine intellect would not be quite so high, perhaps.'

So he went off, the strong man armed, to begin the fight; and we looked after him as he strode down the street, for my own part always with the feeling that we had somehow changed places.

'Robert will get, I suppose, some day, the desire of his heart,' said Isabel. 'I wonder why men desire these things?'

'They are very grand things,' I told her. 'Robert wants to be a leader of men. Is not that a great thing to desire? What greater thing can there be?'

'Yes, if he is fit for it, and if he be a wise leader. But Robert puts the leadership first and the wisdom next. He only desires the wisdom in order to get the leadership.'

'Nay, Isabel; we must think exactly the contrary. Otherwise, how is the world ever to respect the leader?'

'I cannot think anything except what I know.'

'Well, then, power is a very great thing to have. Every man in the world, except myself, ought to desire power. I don't want it, I confess, because I am not ambitious. Perhaps that is philosophy. Give me a tranquil, an obscure life, if you like, with private interests—boat-building, for instance—and—what it seems I shall have to forego.'

Isabel paid no heed to the latter sentence, but went on talking about Robert. 'Always to lead, always to command—that is Robert's single thought. If he was King, he would not be contented unless he ruled the whole world.'

'A noble ambition, truly.'

'Sometimes I wonder whether all the great men of history have been self-seekers as well as masterful.'

'I should say all. The personal motives, desire of place and authority, must underlie everything else.'

'Then, how can any woman love a man who thinks of nothing but himself? I could not, George; but you know it—you—I cannot.'

'Well, Isabel, a woman may love the greatness and strength of the man, first of all. Besides, she may call that a noble ambition which you call self-seeking; she may call that tenacity which you call selfishness; she may lend her whole strength'—I thought of Frances and what she would do—'to advance the career in which her husband is absorbed without asking for thanks or recognition from him at all.'

'I could not do it, George. The thought of devotion without thanks or recognition makes me wretched. I could never love a man who would accept such work. Besides, I could never love a man unless I filled his heart, and made him think of me.'

So she spoke, telling me all her thoughts in sweet confidence, knowing that it would not be abused. Well, some women differ. Frances would be contented, if only her husband became a great man, with neither thanks nor recognition. Isabel cared nothing about the greatness. And I suppose that some women are contented with the ideal they have set up. They love not the strong man for his strength, nor the weak man for his weakness; they love an imaginary man. In this way the noblest woman may love the lowest man, seeing her ideal even through the matted overgrowth of animalism. Isabel had no power, unfortunately, of setting up an ideal. In this case she knew the real man in his workshop, without his coat—so to speak, in his shirt-sleeves. I said so. 'You worked with him, and for him, Isabel; that destroyed the ideal. No man is a hero to his type-writer.'

'Perhaps; but love and mastery cannot go together. Well, Robert is now beginning the career of which he has thought so much. It will be ten years, you say—

ten years—ten good long years—before he succeeds. Ah! a great deal may happen in ten years. He will grow tired; I shall grow old. I hope I shall grow old and hideous.'

'A great deal may happen in ten years. Yes. Men may ask to be released from hasty promises. Anything may happen. Perhaps, again, he will never succeed.'

'We must not dare to hope that he will fail. It would be like hoping that he was dead.'

'If he were any ordinary person I should say that his ambition was wildly presumptuous. Seeing that he is Robert, and seeing what Robert stands for, I do not call it wild. Yet there are many things in the way far more than he understands as yet. Let us be patient, Isabel. If you are waiting, I am waiting too. When you promised to wait his will, you passed that sentence upon me as well.'

For three weeks nothing happened. At the house we went on as usual, but without Robert, who remained at Westminster, living in my chambers, while I took over the work of his boat-yard all day, and the care of his mistress every evening. We were loyal to him; there was passed between us no word or look of which one need be ashamed. Isabel had repeated her promise; she had renewed the oath; one could only wait.

One morning, however, I found a letter lying on my plate. It was from Frances. I opened it. A long letter. I laid it aside. With my second cup of tea I began to read it leisurely; but over the second page I jumped with interjections.

'My dear George' (she began),

'I was in the House last night looking down upon the new lot. They seem to be rather a mixed lot.

We have had losses. However, a good many of our old friends are back again, and the majority is assured, and is large enough if the Whips do their duty. Alas! if my mother were still living, with her salon and her dinners, that majority would become a solid block growing every day. I might myself have such a salon, if there was a man anywhere for whose sake I could take the trouble, and make myself a leader. But, George, as you know very well, there is not.'

I laid down the note. I could see in imagination Frances writing these words. She would throw down the pen and spring to her feet in impatience—in queenly impatience—because among all her subjects she could not find one man strong enough. Yet to one strong and ambitious she would give, not only herself, but also such help in his career as few, very few, men could hope for; the help of a very long purse, very great family influence, political experience, and social power. She wanted to find such a man; she desired above all things to be a political lady, the wife of a great political leader. She would exact from him in return for all she gave nothing but devotion to his career; she would acquiesce in his working and thinking for no other object.

On the other side of the table sat the other type of woman—one who wanted nothing of life but love, with sufficiency and tranquillity; one who would be perfectly contented with a life in the shade, and with a perfectly obscure husband.

As for myself, it seemed then, and it seems now, as if no distinctions—which do not distinguish—were worth the struggle and conflict, the misrepresentation and lies and slanders of the party contest. Whereas, to live in obscurity beside a babbling brook, or Wapping Old

Stairs, for instance; among thick woods—the burial ground of St. John's, Wapping, for instance; in country lanes with high hedges on either side—say the High Street, Wapping; with love and Isabel . . . I resumed the letter:

'The questions do really grow more tedious every day. At last the adjourned debate began again—at half-past nine. You never take interest in anything really interesting, my dear George, so that it is useless to tell you that the Bill was a Labour Bill, and that everybody thought it a very useful Bill—even the working men Members until to-night. The Bill, everybody says, will have to be abandoned. In other words, your cousin, in a single maiden speech, has done the Government the injury of making them withdraw a Bill. It is equivalent to a defeat. But I am anticipating. My dear George, your cousin's speech is talked of by everybody.'

'Where's the paper?' I cried. 'Give it to me, Captain.' I tore it open and looked at the debates. Yes, there it was! Robert had made his first speech. 'Look, Isabel!' I cried. 'Look! he has succeeded with a single speech.' I threw the paper across the table and went on reading:

'I dare say you will have seen all about it in the papers. Now, it is very curious; I had almost forgotten that your cousin was a candidate. They told me that he had no chance whatever, and I left off thinking about him as a candidate. Of course, I could not forget the fiery orator of Shadwell, or the hero of the splendid fight that I witnessed. So that when he got up to speak I was quite unprepared for him. Of course, I remembered him instantly; he is not the kind of man one forgets readily. I think he is quite the handsomest man in the House; not the tallest, but what they used to call the properest man and the comeliest; he has not the least air of fashion, but he has the look of distinction.'

'Good,' said the Captain. 'I always said that he looked like a Duke.'

'Read the speech, George,' said Isabel, 'and then go on with the letter.'

I read the speech aloud. The oblique narrative makes everything cold. Even in direct narrative one loses the voice—in this case so rich and musical a voice—and the aspect of the man, the personality of the speaker—in this case so marked and so distinguished. Now, the House of Commons may be cold—how can that unhappy body, doomed to listen day after day to floods and cataracts of words, be anything but cold?—but I was sure even from this dry précis that the members must have listened with surprise and delight. The close of the speech I turned back from the oblique to direct narrative, and read it in the first person.

'Oh!' said Isabel. 'I think I hear him speaking. Those facts I copied for him myself from a Blue-book.'

'Robert will be a great man,' said the Captain. 'My dear, they will make him something. He will be a nobleman, and you will be my Lady.'

'You read it just as Robert would speak it,' said Isabel. 'Your voice is like his, only not so strong. But you are like him in so many ways.'

'It is a noble speech, Isabel.'

'It is his first bid for power,' she distinguished. 'I dare say it is an able speech. But I feel as if I had been behind the scenes while he was preparing the show. To me, George, it will always be a show.'

'You are like the child who wants to go beyond the story, Isabel. Why not be contented with the things presented?'

Why, indeed, not be contented with the show? If one were to analyze things and to discover the real motives and the springs of action, what would become of the patriot, the statesman, the philanthropist? What worth are the tender words of the poet? What consolation is left in the sermon of the preacher? No man, I said, is a hero to his typewriter: Isabel was the typewriter. There must be rehearsals and stage management, even for the effective conduct of a martyrdom. One may be filled with pity for the poor, with enthusiasm for a cause; but consider how emotion is stirred into action when the personal ambitions and the private interests lie in the same direction. 'It is the first bid for power,' said Isabel. So it was; and yet that speech, while it revealed the speaker, killed a Bill which might have involved mischief incalculable. The perfect private secretary—a very, very rare creature—is able to forget the rehearsals and the stage management.

I laid down the paper and took up the letter again, and read it aloud:

'I told you, George, in that East End den, that the man was a born orator. He spoke better to-night, in the House, than before those working men—perhaps because he was more careful. He is one of those speakers, I mean, with whom repression increases strength. He spoke consciously, I am sure, to the country as well as to the House. His voice is magnetic in its richness and fulness; his periods are balanced; he spoke without the least hesitation, yet without the fatal fluency. He was not embarrassed; he spoke with authority. The effect of his speech upon the House was wonderful; the members were dominated. They listened—compelled to listen. When he sat down there was a universal gasp, not of relief, but of astonishment.

'Of course I do not know what your cousin means or wishes by going into the House. Probably nothing but a vague ambition. What should such a man understand of the political career? Yet, when I say "such a man," I think of his trade, not of his appearance or his manner. He looks like a king, and has the manners—in the House, at least, whatever he might have in society—of one accustomed to the best people. Come and talk to me about him.

'Of course, also, one must never judge by a first speech. It is always interesting to hear the maiden effort. Very likely your cousin prepared every phrase and every word of it, and he would break down in debate. I wait for his second speech, and for a speech in reply.

'The member for Shadwell, as I told you before, is absurdly like you in face and in general appearance, but he is a bigger man. Perhaps he resembles the Judge, who was a very big man, more than you. Well, George, for your sake I shall watch his movements and read his speeches. He may do something considerable; he may not. Many a man makes a good beginning in the House who cannot keep it up. The floor is knee-deep with the dust and bones of dead and gone ambitions. They take the place of the rushes which they formerly strewed on the floor. I was looking at the faces of the members last night. There were the old stagers who have long since parted with their ambitions, and now sit quiet and resigned, and vote like sheep. Why do they do it? What is the joy of remaining all their lives among the rank and file? Then I saw the faces of the new young men. I made them all out, one after the other, those who are ambitious and those who are not. Oh, George! what an interesting place the House of Commons is, and why—why—why have you left it to a tradesman cousin to have all the ambition in the family?'

I read all this aloud.

'Who is your correspondent, George?' Isabel asked. 'I suppose it is your friend, Lady Frances. Why is she so contemptuous about tradesmen?'

'She only thinks that I ought to have gone into the House, Isabel. It is her way of expressing herself.'

However, the rest I did not read aloud:

'You may bring your cousin to see me, George. I am at home this day week. You so seldom come to see me that I am almost tempted to come over to Wapping. But it would be too dreadful to see you among the chips, with your coat off and your sleeves turned up, and an apron, and, I dare say, disfiguring callosities already appearing on your hands. When you are sick and tired of it, come back to the world. Lord Caerleon will soon want a private secretary. The post would suit you entirely. He is a man of the world—not a politician only. And there are still things to be had worth the having, and in the gift of Ministers, which are not awarded by competitive examination to candidates who certainly have no more merit than you yourself. Come back. Great Donkey, it is dull without you.

'Your affectionate sister—by adoption,

'FRANCES.'

CHAPTER XIX.

LADY FRANCES AT HOME.

I found Robert satisfied—he used the word himself—with his first success.

'I could have desired nothing better,' he said, 'than such a chance. So far as I can learn, there will be a good many more such chances before long. What does Isabel say? But, of course, she takes no interest in the subject.'

'Would you like a woman's opinion, Robert?'

'I don't know. Women don't count for much in politics, or in anything else, as far as judgment goes.'

'The woman I know counts for a great deal. She is an old friend of mine—a friend from childhood. She is the daughter of a Prime Minister, and the widow of a Secretary of State, and she is an ardent politician. Well, Robert, she is a very charming woman, too. I took her to Shadwell to hear you speak. She came again that night when you fought the rushers, and she was in the House last night. And she commands me to bring you to her next "At Home."'

'Oh,' said Robert.

'You are quite wrong—absurdly wrong—in your views of women. They may be extremely useful in politics; they have often played a great part. A certain Delilah was a politician, I believe. She coaxed a giant out of his sense and his secret.'

'Are you going to get me coaxed out of my strength?'

'Not a bit. I am taking you to a woman who will add to your strength if you are so happy as to win her interest.'

'A party politician.'

'Certainly—a party politician, as you will be before long.' He shook his head. 'For the rest, the less important affairs, she is a most delightful person, handsome and rich. The way to her friendship is to be strong, capable, and ambitious. You are all three. She is prepared to welcome you. Of course you will come?'

We were dining at my club. I do not think that there was anything in the quiet, assured manner of my cousin Robert to make anyone suspect that three months before this man had never even possessed a dress-coat, had never seen a dinner properly served, had never tasted claret, and had never dined after one.

'Of course, I know,' he said slowly, 'what you mean by this invitation; it means that you think I may now enter a drawing-room.'

'Partly. You can never be taken for a man born and brought up in the Eton and Trinity way. You don't desire such a thing. But you are now one who has the bearing and the speech of a gentleman.'

'I will go with you; I am not afraid of being dazzled either by a woman's face or by her finery, or by a man's titles, nor any airs and affectations, nor by the languid superiority of some of your fellows. I know my own value, and that, I take it, is the best foundation possible for courtly manners. And so you think I am polished enough for a drawing-room, do you?'

'Not polished, but finished. If you went farther you would lose your natural manner. You could never lose the form and figure which proclaim your strength. Your big head, your broad shoulders, your short, curly hair, your square beard, your deep-set eyes—I swear that you are just the strongest-looking man in the world.'

Robert laughed. No one, not even the strongest-looking man in the world, dislikes being described as looking what he most desires to be.

* * * * *

Lady Frances's rooms were already well filled when we arrived; later they were crowded. She welcomed me with her customary kindness. 'I shall never cease to reproach you,' she said; 'but I have forgiven you.'

She was dressed in all her splendour—a blaze of diamonds, a vision of silk (if it was silk), of velvet (if it was velvet). She might have stood to Robert for some great Court lady. Her queenly stature, her noble figure, her large head and ample cheek, set off her splendid dress. She looked as if this was the only dress she ought to wear; she looked indeed a *grande dame de par le monde.*

I presented my cousin. For the moment Robert was staggered. I saw upon his face an expression of weakness quite new to him. It was the weakness of the strong man in the presence, for the first time, of the queenly woman.

She received him with gracious courtesy.

After a few words, I left Robert to talk a little with his hostess. While they stood together, there entered a little old man with shaggy white eyebrows, keen eyes, and a white mane and a big head—a leonine person. Frances shook hands with him, and then turned to Robert.

'Mr. Burnikel,' she said, 'let me introduce you to Lord Caerleon. Mr. Burnikel is Member for Shadwell, and a cousin of your friend, Sir George.'

Lord Caerleon shook hands with him. 'On our side, Mr. Burnikel, I hope.'

'I have entered the House as an Independent Member,' said Robert sturdily.

'Oh!' Lord Caerleon replied dryly. 'Yes, I have known several young men announce that intention; but they change it—they change it. There is a good deal to be got out of the House by an ambitious man who goes the right way to work—a great deal: distinction and recognition, that is something; place and power, that is something. You are a lawyer, perhaps.'

'No; I am not a member of any learned profession. I am a Master Craftsman—by trade a boat-builder.'

'Oh!' Lord Caerleon refrained from the least expression of surprise. 'But one may imagine that every young man who goes into the House is actuated by some ambition.'

'My ambition is to make a mark in the House—and out of it,' said Robert.

'Then, sir, I wish you every success; and you will speedily discover that, in order to make that mark, you must join a Party—that is, our Party—my Party.'

Lord Caerleon left him and walked over to me. He was a former friend of my grandfather, the Judge. 'Is that your cousin, George?' he asked—'that tall, good-looking fellow over there, Member for Shadwell?'

'He is my cousin, certainly, though rather distant.'

'Oh! He said he was a—a—a boat-builder. Did he speak some kind of allegory?'

'A hundred years ago my great-grandfather and his great-grandfather were partners in a boat-building-yard. At the same time, if I remember rightly, your great-grandfather, Lord Caerleon——'

'Was unknown. Certainly. Yet one does not expect to see an actual boat-builder in a place like this, and looking and talking like a gentleman. You and I, Sir George, belong to the third generation of those who were born in the purple of gentlehood. This man says he is a Master Craftsman. Do we receive the man with a plane and a chisel in our drawing-rooms?'

'He is a master of labour; he employs many men. I believe he will prove himself to be a Master Craftsman in the craft of oratory and debate. He is the strongest man, Lord Caerleon, the most courageous man, and the most finished man, that I know. You can't dazzle him. You can't frighten him. And I am quite certain, from his first speech, that he will carry away the House as he carries away his constituents. Look after him, Lord Caerleon. Don't forget to reckon with him as soon as you can.'

Lord Caerleon looked at me thoughtfully, but made no reply. Half an hour later I saw that he was again talking with Robert.

Thinking of what the man was when first I knew him; how contemptuous of social conventions; how determined to go into the House as a rough craftsman; to set everybody right on all questions of labour and employers, knowing nothing whatever of the ways and manners by which alone anything real can be accomplished; and seeing the man in this salon, quiet and assured, yet strangely unlike the ordinary young man of the West End, I was elated to think of my success. To be sure, I had a pupil who was determined to learn. But, then, a well-bred manner is to some people impossible to learn, or to assume, if they work at it all their lives. To Robert the manner came easily.

'He has the air,' said Frances, reading my thoughts, because I was looking across the room, 'of a man who has lived in the best society, but not our own. Has he lived in New York ?'

'No ; he has only lived in Wapping—a distinguished suburb near the place where you heard him speak.'

'Wapping has, then, I suppose, a curiously distinguished society of its own. Has Wapping a nobility, an opera-house, ladies of the world ? Seriously, George, how did this man arrive at a distinguished manner as well as a distinguished look ? You know—I told you—when I heard him speak. I made up my mind that he was a born orator.'

'Well, Frances, he has practised a very honest trade ; that prevents meanness ; and he has read enormously, so that his level of thought is elevated ; and he takes himself very seriously, so that he is self-confident ; and he is quick to observe ; so that, altogether, I think you may understand how he has arrived at his present manner.'

'He is not a young man for a young lady. I introduced him to one just now, and they separated five minutes afterwards with a lively look of mutual repulsion. Perhaps he began by telling her, as he told Lord Caerleon, that he was a boat-builder.'

'Very likely.'

Then I retired into a corner and looked on. I saw that Frances looked after this guest with a care which she seemed to bestow upon no others. She talked to him, she introduced him to people, especially to members of the House ; and I saw that he was not dazzled—not in the least dazzled—by title, or by fine dress, or fine manners. It was impossible to condescend with such a man ; most likely he condescended to the condescender.

'I like it, George,' he said. when we found ourselves together. 'I like the crowd and the fine dresses and all. It is amusing. I don't belong to it in the least. That makes it all the more amusing.'

'And the women—how do you like them?'

'Lady Frances is splendid! I do not see any other woman in the place.'

It was filled with women: some young and beautiful, some old and no longer beautiful; all well dressed, and most of them animated. But he had no eyes except for Lady Frances.

Presently all were gone; I alone remained behind.

'Let us sit down, George, for a few minutes' quiet talk. Come into the little room. You may have a cigarette, if you like. Now about that tall cousin of yours. Do you really think that he has the qualities necessary for success? It is not enough to fire off a speech now and then, you know.'

'Well, he says he has these qualities. Whatever he says is always true. Quite a man of his word, you know. I think he has these qualities. The House loves a strong man beyond anything. Remember how they all turned round about Bradlaugh. Well, Bradlaugh was a strong man, if you like; and Bradlaugh knew a lot; but Bradlaugh in all his glory wasn't, I really believe, a patch on my cousin Robert.'

Frances became thoughtful. 'You know, George,' after a pause, 'I was bitterly disappointed that you did not go into politics. You would have had every kind of help. I cannot tell you half the dreams I had nourished about your success. Everything is possible for such a man as you. And you basely deserted us and went off boat-building. Oh, heavens! — boat-building!'

'I did, Frances. I am a wretch.'

'Well, the Party wants a few young men — good young men. If I can get that big, strong man, your cousin, to throw himself heartily into the Party, he may prove himself worthy of being looked after. Help me with him, George.'

'What am I to do?'

'Bring him to dinner with me. I will have a little dinner of you two first; then a little dinner alone with him; then a little dinner with one or two of the chiefs thrown in. Then—but you understand how a woman works in such a case. I want him for the Party.'

'What will you offer him?'

'I don't know yet; we must see first what he is worth, and next what he wants. An ordinary young man would be contented with dining with me. He would then go home and dream of making love to me—they all do. Then he would come here and try to make that dream a reality. But a young man with a great future before him would want more than that. What would he want?'

'One thing, Frances. Don't speak to him just yet of place or salary. The man thinks nothing about money. Later on, when he discovers that his few hundreds a year won't buy all things he wants, he will, perhaps, modify his views.'

'What will tempt him, then?'

'Power. He wants Power. He would be another Gladstone, another Bismarck. He desires Power about everything. The greatest presumption—the greatest audacity.'

Frances sighed. 'Oh!' she said, 'if they had only made me a man! George, there is but one thing in the world that I desire, and that is Power. I could get it easily, even though I am a woman, if I had a husband strong and able and ambitious, and worth working for. Where is that man? You ought to have been such a man, George, but you're not. You are only a common carpenter. Oh, the grovelling of it!'

'I will become a cabinet-maker, if you like, Frances, and make the Cabinet in which my cousin is to sit.'

CHAPTER XX.

AT THE YARD.

A FEW days afterwards Robert came over to the yard. He came during the men's dinner-hour, when a delightful calm settles down upon Wapping, and even the cranes and the donkey-engines are silent; when the waggons rumble no longer, and there is no ringing of bells, and no hammering of hammers, and no grinding of machines. And we sat upon two workmen's benches opposite each another and talked.

'I saw Lady Frances yesterday,' he began; 'she was good enough to invite me to call, and so I did call, and had a long talk with her.'

'Good!'

'She's a splendid woman! That's the kind of woman to back up a man. I used to think that a man wants no help from any woman. I now see that a clever, sympathetic woman who understands things may be of the greatest use.'

'Undoubtedly. Lady Frances could help a man very much in politics if she chose. She might help you—but it must be in her own way. She is interested in you already.'

'Of course she's all for Party. She says I must join her Party, or else there is no chance.'

'You've heard that before, haven't you? Well, there is no chance outside the grooves; I am certain of it.'

'Anyhow, I won't join a party. I went in an Independent Member, and I'll continue an Independent Member. Nothing whatever shall induce me to join the rank and file of Party, to run about and say what I am told to say—nothing, mind you. Not even to get the assistance of that woman.'

He spoke with the determination of approaching submission. His words had a forced ring in them; their exaggeration showed weakness. He was under temptation.

'Then, Robert, farewell, a long farewell, to dreams of greatness!'

'We talked about my speech, and she spoke highly of it. Well, why not? A very good speech it was. When we came to read it next day, how it stood out from the windbags and froth of the rest!—you noticed that, George?'

'I did. A very fine speech—full of solid stuff.'

Robert never pretended to any modesty as regards his own work. He honestly thought it a great deal better than the work of anybody else, and he said so, without any affectation of inferiority. This candour impressed people. Other men it might injure, but not Robert. Very few men, indeed, do really possess a sincere, unaffected admiration for their own powers. Most of us are spoiled by diffidence. It is not everyone who realizes his own value.

'Of course,' he added, 'she admired the speech.'

'She admired your speech. What else did she say? What did she advise?'

'Well, of course, criticisms are not always pleasant, but she has a large experience. She says, to begin with, that I must not be too earnest. You always said that, and I believe she's right. The Members don't like a preacher nor a funeral sermon. Everybody used to get up and go out in the old days when John Stuart Mill lectured the House. I've got to cultivate a lighter vein for ordinary occasions. Well, I believe I can do that; only I was anxious for them to learn the facts. I had to teach them the facts. Don't they want the facts, then?'

'They don't want the trouble of learning them.'

'She advises me very strongly to follow up the success of the first speech. This time I must answer someone, and prove that I have the power of debate. Well, George, though I now see very plainly that our little mock Parliament was conceited and cocky and shallow——'

'Isn't that almost enough in the way of adjectives for one little mock Parliament?'

'Yet it did give me certain power of reply and repartee—as I mean to show the House at the earliest opportunity.'

'Very good. Next.'

'Oh, then we began talking about other things. It seems odd that I should be taking advice about my own affairs from a woman, doesn't it?'

'It would have seemed odd three months ago.'

'But, of course, Lady Frances isn't an ordinary woman. She's got the brains of fifty women and the experience of a hundred put together. What a woman she is!'

'How did she advise you about your own affairs?'

'She asked me about myself. Of course I told her everything there is to tell. Why should I conceal things? I even told her how you have given your evenings for three months or more to show me what the West-End world was like. She strongly advises me to go into society. "Become one of the world," she says.'

'Did she tell you how to get in? The gates of what she calls the world do not exactly stand open to everybody.'

'Exactly. What they call Society is divided into circles, and there are circles within circles. There are art circles, literary circles, musical circles, rich circles, exclusive circles, dramatic circles—all kinds, overlapping each other. And there are political circles; and in them she could launch me—of course on the usual conditions.'

'Party, of course.'

'Party. No room anywhere, it seems, for the Independent Member.'

'And you are an Independent Member. It is unfortunate, isn't it?'

'Says I must join a political club. But there are none for us Independent Members.'

'No; it is unfortunate.'

'Then we talked about the way in which men get on nowadays. No one, not even you, ever before understood my position so perfectly. Whatever I tell her, she catches it in a minute. One would think she had lived next door. And about the ways of men—they don't climb, George, they wriggle—they wriggle, most of them.'

'So I have heard. That is partly why I came here. I don't like wriggling.'

'Wriggling and advertising. One must be like the man who advertises his soap, always before the world.'

'That is, in fact, the first thing, and the second thing, and everything.'

'She told me about one man who has certainly got on remarkably well, yet not so well as I mean to do, because he hasn't the same ability. This man, who, like me, had no family influence, got into a political club, wrote a paper now and again for one of the magazines, spoke frequently at public meetings, was seen everywhere at private views, and first nights, and at private houses, went into the House, spoke on occasion and with weight, published a volume of essays, was accepted as a man who went everywhere long before Society received him at all, and is now married to a woman whose wealth and connections will advance him rapidly.'

'That may be your fate.'

'But the trickery of it!'

'If you want to achieve a definite object, you cannot always choose the way. Nobody but yourself, remember, knows your own motives. What you call trickery may appear to the world as the natural rewards of ability.'

'Well—but—I don't know.' He walked to the edge of the Quay, looking up and down the river. 'It is a world so different from anything I ever imagined,' he said. 'You have opened out the world to me. I confess that I hesitate to venture in upon this kind of path.'

'You don't think that you are the only ambitious man in the world, do you? My dear boy, everybody there is ambitious, except the men who have got up as high as they can. And even then they all want something—a little more social consideration. Everybody for himself, anywhere. Nowhere so much as there, in the City of the Setting Sun—in the West. In other words, you have discovered that your old dreams must be abandoned.'

'I am beginning to understand that it is so. I have been plunged in ignorance. But it is difficult to give up the old ideals.'

'You are a more human creature than I thought you, Robert. I don't believe you will ever be so happy over there as you have been in this old shed among the shavings.'

'It isn't happiness I want; it is success and power. Well, George'—he came to the bench and sat down beside me—'I shall not give up because things are different from what I expected. I mean to go on, though perhaps in another way. I mean, I say, to go on.'

'With a wriggle and a twist?'

'I shall wriggle as little as may be. Now listen carefully, and don't interrupt. I am going to make a proposal to you of the greatest importance.'

'Go on; I will not interrupt.'

'Well, I see very plainly, to begin with, that the way open to me means a good deal of expenditure. I must have good chambers, some place where I can receive people. I must keep myself well groomed.'

'Both points are important.'

'I must have a club. I must cultivate people. There are already plenty of men in the House who want to know me. I must be able to give a dinner occasionally, as Lady Frances advised; and there are the daily expenses, which in the West End run away with so much money. One must go about in cabs; it isn't possible to go without cabs. Why, here I used to spend nothing at all from day to day except our modest house-keeping money. It means money. I must have money, George.'

'Yes, if you are going to live over there. But you've got your business here.'

'I can't live in two places. There you have it. If I am to get on, I must live in the West End; and I can't carry on this business from Piccadilly Chambers, that's quite certain.'

'I'm afraid it's impossible. Shall you sell this business?'

'No, I can't afford to sell the business. But I've thought of a plan, and I'll lay it before you to turn over in your mind. First of all, are you perfectly serious and in earnest about the boat-building trade? Mind, I never believed it. Do you really and truly intend to go into the trade as a living?'

Put in that way, I was staggered, because, you see, I perceived at once what he was driving at.

'What I thought,' I replied slowly, 'when I came here was that I might learn the business from you, and that I might then take my small capital, which is no more than three thousand pounds, and start as a boat-builder in one of the Colonies—British Columbia, for example—wherever I could find an opening. That was my plan, subject to my mastering the mysteries of the craft.'

'You have mastered most of them, and you are a first-class hand already. But you can't be trusted yet in the buying and the selling.'

'Since I've kept the books for you I've learned something of them as well.'

'Yes; but you can't run alone yet. However, that part of it might be managed. Now for my plan. You've got a good pile, though you call it so little. It's a good deal more than I shall want. Give up the idea of a Colony. Settle here in the old place—you can go on living in the old house, if you like—and become my partner—the managing partner. You shall buy your share. Don't think that I want only to get your money, though that will be of the greatest use to me just now. You will make your solicitor examine the books—for that matter, you have the books already in your hands—and he will tell you what you ought to offer, if you entertain the proposal. Come! Burnikel and Burnikel it has always been called. There were once two cousins in it before they quarrelled over the old man's diamonds. Let there be two cousins in it again. Robert and George they were once. Robert and George they will be again.' He got up from the bench. 'You want time to decide,' he said. 'Don't press yourself. Take as much time as you like. I will advise you in any difficulty, but I will no longer think for the business. You will have to do that. Well, turn it over in your mind, and tell me when you have decided.'

So he got up and left me. Then the men came back from their dinner, and the work went on again.

The most remarkable part of the proposal was that we were actually going to reverse the situation, to change places. I was to give up clubs, chambers, friends, society, and everything that belongs to the class in which I had been brought up. As I had no fortune that was inevitable. But I was to put my cousin in my place. He would give up his business—hitherto his livelihood—and take my place, and belong to the world. And I was to take his place down in this deserted city of warehouses, where, except the clergy of the parish and myself, there would be no single resident who by any stretch of imagination could call himself of the gentle class.

Ninety years ago the two cousins, Robert and George Burnikel, were partners. After all these years two other cousins, Robert and George Burnikel, were to become partners again.

Ninety years ago Robert and George parted. Robert stayed at the yard; George went West. Now this situation was reversed: George was to stay at the yard; Robert was going West.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SECOND SPEECH.

THEN came the second opportunity. It was three weeks after the first. The occasion was the first reading—or was it the second?—of a Bill for the prohibition of more than five—or was it fifty?—hours' labour in the day, or something to that effect. For my own part, I concern myself about Acts of Parliament only when they bring the tax-gatherer to the door with his little piece of paper. It is a remarkable circumstance in this highly political country that our politics are mostly limited to getting one man in, and that we care very little, when he is once in, what he does, or what anyone else does. If you doubt this allegation, listen to the talk in the train, or where men gather together.

However, we knew it was coming, and Robert got me a seat in the Speaker's Gallery, where I sat during the questions with as much patience as I could command. The Gallery was not crowded; the strangers were people up from the country, with a few Americans. They had opera-glasses, and whispered the names of the members whose faces they knew. The House of Commons is one of the sights of London, which is the reason why so few Londoners ever go to it. As for the House of Lords, I wonder how many Londoners have ever seen that august body in deliberation.

The Bill was introduced with a somewhat short and self-excusing speech. I wish I could remember what the Bill really proposed. Not that it mattered, however. As the subject was not attractive, the House rapidly thinned. There, again, we are the most political people in the world; but the moment a subject is introduced which deals with the realities of life, the welfare of the millions, the case of the unemployed, the rule of India, the agricultural depression, the safety of the Empire, the condition of the navy, the weakness of the army, the departure of trade, the silver question, the House is swiftly and suddenly thinned or emptied. I suppose the reason is that the human brain can only stand a certain amount of dull speech, and that these subjects generally fall into the hands of dull and uninteresting speakers. I really do not know what this speaker said. Presently he sat down. Then Robert arose. I think I was more anxious about his success than he was himself. He was perfectly calm and self-possessed. In his hand he held a small bundle of papers, a striking presence, and he began speaking slowly, with measured phrase, and with his rich musical voice, which at once commanded attention. Of all the gifts of oratory, the most useful is a rich and flexible voice. Then his first speech of three weeks ago, now almost forgotten, was again remembered, and the House became quickly filled again.

As I have forgotten what the Bill was about, and as I paid no attention to the first speaker's Introduction of the Bill, and as I concentrated my attention to the style of Robert's oratory and to the effect it produced, without the least reference to the matter, I cannot reproduce for you the substance of his speech. You may find it in Hansard; in fact, you are sure to find it in

Hansard, if you please to look; you will also find it worth reading. He spoke on a labour question, from his own point of view, as one who was at once a craftsman and an employer. 'I am myself,' he said, with the pride of a duke and the appearance of a gentleman of ancient lineage—'I am myself a Master Craftsman.'

Then he proceeded, from his own experience, and from quotations from Blue-books, to marshal his facts and to set forth his arguments. I did not listen; it was enough for me to let that rolling music of his voice play about my ears, and to watch its effects upon the faces below. Could he grip those faces? He could. Could he move those faces? He could. The average Parliamentary face is singularly cold. One might as well expect that one wave out of all the others would move a hard rock. Yet Robert moved that rocky face. Could he make those faces smile? He could. He had taught himself the lesson—the most difficult for some men to learn—that a speaker should be able to amuse. He related gently humorous anecdotes, so that the House bubbled with rippling laughter, which is far more delightful than the broad roar at more comic strokes. Robert would certainly never become the comic man of the House; but he might become one of the humorists. And this was a new development. Who would have imagined three months before this that the grimly-in-earnest young man, who was going to thunder his gospel into the unwilling ears of the House until he conquered it and laid it at his feet, had become one of those who could treat the most serious subjects from a humorous point of view, and convince by laughter where he would have failed by indignation?

I think, not being a critic, that Robert, like Mr. Gladstone, possessed the wonderful gift of being able to invest the baldest facts and the most intricate figures with interest and charm. Like a novelist, he made them personal. He connected figures with men, and brought facts into touch with humanity. And this he did, as it seemed, spontaneously, without effort or any appearance of lecturing. In the House of Commons a man must not be a lecturer, but an orator. The lecturer is necessarily a critic or a teacher. As lecturer, without imagination, he explains carefully how the orator, the poet, the novelist, the dramatist, produces his effects. He knows exactly, and can tell all the world how it is done—the trick of it. Yet he cannot produce the thing himself. Therefore he is of no use in the House. The orator, poet, dramatist, novelist, on the other hand, produces these effects continually; yet he cannot tell you how he does it.

Robert, then, had this gift of making things attractive. He spoke for an hour or more. The members remained in respectful silence until he worked them up into producing their signs of approbation, of which the House is never chary when it is moved.

When he sat down it was with the pleasing consciousness that he had at least made the House for the second time ask whether they had actually got another coming man. The speech, in fact, produced a very marked impression. Some of the papers quoted it, and made it the subject of leaders.

A few days afterwards he spoke again, and again as a man of personal experience, as a Master Craftsman. His experiences were interesting and effective. And a third time, and a fourth, but always when he had something to say that ought to be said.

Lady Frances gave a dinner-party—a political dinner—at which some of the heads of the Party were present.

And she invited Robert. Among her guests was old Lord Caerleon, to whom he had already been introduced. It was a large party, and Robert's place was down below among the younger men, who were civil to him. But, of course, in the conversation it was impossible for him not to feel that he was an outsider.

After dinner, however, Lord Caerleon again talked with him apart. He talked as one who knows the game, and as one who has played it, and now looked on rather tired of it.

'I have read your speeches, Mr. Burnikel,' he said, much as a schoolmaster may speak of a boy's set of verses. 'As reported, they were fair. I am told that they produced—ah! some effect upon the House. I am told that you have a good delivery and a good voice. Is that so?'

'It is so,' said Robert calmly. 'I have a good voice by nature, and a good delivery by art.'

'Yes.' Lord Caerleon looked just a little astonished at a young man who thus immodestly claimed these gifts. 'A good voice is a great thing. You have begun well, Mr. Burnikel. But a good beginning in the House counts for nothing. The House is filled, to me, with the ghosts of men who in my recollection made a good beginning.'

'I have made a good beginning, Lord Caerleon; and, with your permission, I intend not to become a ghost at all.'

'Very good—very good indeed. But, Mr. Burnikel, how are you going to get on? Permit me—I understand, for some mysterious reasons of your own, you still wish to be considered an Independent Member. You told me so, if I remember rightly, in this house two or three weeks ago.'

'That is so. I am returned by my constituents as an Independent Member.'

'I don't think it matters much what they think. But I suppose you talked the usual stuff—voting to order, no conscience, changing opinions, and the rest of it?'

'All the rest of it,' said Robert quietly.

'Of course you did. Now, then, Mr. Burnikel, let us go into the question of Party for a few minutes; not the whole question of Party, on which you have read—or ought to have read—your Constitutional History, but that part of the question that affects you personally.'

'You do me great honour.'

'I talk to you, sir, because I think that you may possibly—I don't know—turn out an acquisition to either party. Otherwise, of course, one cannot at my age, and with my experience, pretend to take the least interest in the average member. I take the personal side, then. You propose, I believe, to make a career in politics?'

'I do.'

'Lady Frances tells me—you told me so yourself, if I remember rightly—that you are extremely ambitious. I am pleased to hear it. Well, you cannot be too ambitious. Nothing does a young man so much good. It is impossible to be too ambitious. It was my own great happiness, for example, to be born with enormous ambitions, which have been gratified, yet not satiated—not satiated. Get me a chair; I think I will sit down So; thank you. Ambition,' he went on, 'the desire for personal distinction, is one of the finest gifts that a boy can conceive. I always had it. You would, I dare say, if we were to compare symptoms, and if you were dissected, present the same phenomena. Therefore, you may suppose that what you were as a boy that I was too—with such differences as the accidents of birth, and perhaps position, may have caused. For your encouragement, sir, I will tell you that my rise in the House was not due to any family influence. I was the son of a country clergyman, but, like your cousin, Sir George—an excellent young man, if he possessed any ambition—the grandson of a Judge and a Peer. There was very little money in the family, but enough for me to get into the House. And I say, in my age, that my highest ambitions have been gratified, but not satiated. Believe me, sir, the ambitious man enjoys the winning of every step—one after the other. He is never satiated; he can never say "enough."'

'Well, sir,' said Robert, 'you have never had occasion to regret having embarked upon this splendid career.'

'Certainly not. If I were to be offered the choice once again, I would choose the same career.'

'You have led the House,' said Robert; 'you have been in three Cabinets; you have been First Lord of the Treasury. Well, my lord, what you desired and attained, that I have the audacity also to desire. Perhaps I shall attain it.'

'Not if you continue in your present course. The one condition which was imposed upon me is also imposed upon you. You must rise in the customary manner by becoming a faithful servant of your party.'

'That we will see,' said Robert, obstinate and incredulous.

'How, then, do you propose to climb? My dear sir, before you rises an inaccessible precipice. There are only two ladders. Would you fly?'

'I wish to climb by doing good work.'

'My case, too—exactly my case. I kept on saying that while I was at Oxford. It is really a very fine thing to think, though it is a very foolish—and, indeed, a boyish—thing to say. Mr. Burnikel, you ought to understand by this time that there is only one possible way of climbing, and that is, as I said, by one of the only two ladders. No other way exists, believe me, young man. If there were any other way, it would have been found out long ago.'

'There was the case of John Bright.'

'He had to join the Party at last, remember. John Bright was in every way exceptional; he wanted neither money, nor place, nor power, nor rank. You, I should imagine, want everything.'

Robert was silent.

'So that's settled. If you want to climb, enter by the usual gate, and you will find the ladder waiting for you. Let us pass on to consider the noble work by which you desire to make a mark in history. Noble work, for a politician, means great and beneficent measures. You, as an Independent Member, would never be able to pass any considerable measure—not any single measure of the least importance. Why? Because all great measures are adopted, as soon as it is found possible to pass them, by the Government. As for moving public opinion so as to make these measures possible, that is done by essayists, leader-writers, authors, poets, dramatists, and other intelligent persons, who nowadays prevent a Minister from being original in his ideas. You, as an Independent Member, would have no chance at all—not the least ghost of a chance—even of introducing a Bill.'

'I always thought——'

'Think so no longer. Look about you and face the facts. They are these: An Independent Member, whatever he could formerly accomplish, which wasn't much, will never more be able to introduce or to pass any measure, good or bad; he can never become a leader in the House; he can never have the least chance of proving himself a statesman; all he can hope to do is to get the House to listen to him, and, through the House, the outside world; and believe me, sir, on the most favourable condition possible, you will never, as an Independent Member, acquire half or a quarter of the influence over your country that is enjoyed by an anonymous leader-writer on a great daily paper.'

Robert made no reply.

'Will such a condition content you, sir? Does such a position gratify your ambitions? Why, you have just told me what they are. Pray, sir'—Lord Caerleon looked up sharply with his keen eyes under his shaggy eyebrows—'will this content you?'

'No; it will not.'

'Let us go on, then. You have told me that you have been pleased, in the education of your Shadwell constituents, to speak of party allegiance as a slavery, a stifling of conscience, a suppression of manhood, and so on. You did talk like this?'

'Certainly. It is the only way of talking.'

'So you think. Now let us look at it in this way: There is a party which, in the main, clings to the old things, and only admits change when new and irresistible forces command change. There is another party which is always desiring change, because they think that things might look prettier, or because things would be more logical, or because things might help the people, or themselves, by being changed. In the main, every measure belongs to one or other of these parties. Is not that so?'

'Perhaps.'

'Every measure which is brought forward by one or other of the two sides has been talked about, advocated, discussed in newspapers, in magazines, everywhere, long before. It is brought forward at last when one party has made up its mind to support it, and the other to oppose it. The House is divided into two camps, in which are the two armies. The Bill is proposed and meets its fate. All is done in order, according to the rules of the game. You understand?'

'Of course.'

'What would you have? A House filled with a mob of six hundred undisciplined, separate individuals, all clamouring together—every one fighting to bring forward some fad and fancy of his own? What a House would that be? What kind of legislation would you expect of such a House?'

Robert at the moment could suggest no kind of legislation.

'Suppose you think over the matter from this point of view, Mr. Burnikel. Construct—that is, in your imagination—the House filled with Independent Members, and see how it would work. Oblige me by doing this.'

Robert bowed gravely.

'I dare say that you have already recognised this view of the question. But there are times when the mind seems more especially open to the apprehension of plain truths. This is, perhaps, one of those occasions. The very name of Lady Frances fills one with the idea of Party.'

'I will, at least, consider your view.'

'Well—and now, Mr. Burnikel, I want to speak quite plainly, and, I take it, you are not a man to be offended with plain speech. Very good. You are not a rich man, I believe, nor a man of family?'

'I have already told you that I am a boat-builder—a Master Craftsman—and my income is small.'

'I have heard as much. Well, your birth and position should be no bar to your ambitions. You have heard that I began with much the same disadvantage. You will very soon find your way about. You are in excellent hands so long as Lady Frances takes an interest in you, and I hope that you will find, as I did, that this is the very best country in the world for a young man of ability and courage and ambition.' He rose from the chair. 'So. I have said nearly all I wished to say.'

'Thank you,' said Robert humbly. He was touched by the comparison of the man who had succeeded with himself.

'Not quite all. Some of the people think that you may possibly be a coming man. I'm sure I don't know.' Lord Caerleon, who had worked himself up into some eagerness, became all at once limp and tired. 'There are too many wrecks. I have had too many disappointments. But—I say—I don't know. Anything may happen. I don't think I could have made such a clever speech as yours of the other day. I don't know. Anyhow, we are watching you. And—I don't know—it depends entirely on your own ability and common-sense. I believe you may find friends and backers—when you give up nonsense, and are content to play the game according to the rules. But—I don't know. Good-evening, Mr. Burnikel.'

He inclined his head with dignity. The interview was at an end.

'I was very glad,' said Lady Frances, after this conversation, 'to see Lord Caerleon talking so long and so earnestly with you. It is a sign that he takes a personal interest in you. Believe me, Mr. Burnikel, it is a great honour to have been able to interest that old Parliamentary hand.'

'I am indeed very much obliged to him for the trouble he took to convert me to his views.'

'I will tell you a secret, as people always say when they tell a thing that everybody knows: Lord Caerleon came here this evening on purpose to meet you and have the talk with you.'

'Did he really?' Robert, who was not to be dazzled, blushed like a girl.

'He did indeed. And, Mr. Burnikel, I understand from your cousin that you are a very masterful man, and that you think very much of your own opinion. Only, remember, you are young, as regards political life. You cannot possibly know as much, or anything like as much, as Lord Caerleon, who is seventy-seven; and as regards the House, you are yet only a theorist, and Lord Caerleon has an experience of fifty years. You are a very strong man, Mr. Burnikel, but strength wants experience. You must not feel shame at the outset to be guided.'

Thus skilfully did this diplomatist play upon the weakness of the strong man. The stronger the man, the more this weakness may be played upon. It is your weakling who has no such vanity.

'Let us talk again about this subject, Mr. Burnikel. I cannot talk freely to-night. Come to-morrow afternoon—it is not my day—and we will consider the thing calmly and from your own personal point of view. Oh, I understand it perfectly; but ambition, Mr. Burnikel—ambition must use the appointed ways. We belong to our own generation; we are subject to the conditions of our time; and, *enfin*, you must not waste what might be—and will be—a great career, for the sake of a visionary scruple.'

Robert went away in a thoughtful mood. The observations made by the noble lord went straight home. If, by remaining an Independent Member, he obtained neither power nor place, nor even the introduction of the great, remarkable, never before imagined, measures of which, in ignorance of his powers and possibilities, he had vaguely dreamed, he might as well keep out of Parliament altogether, and go on haranguing the working men of Shadwell.

The day after the dinner Frances wrote me a letter.

'I have just parted,' she said, 'with your remarkable cousin. He dined with me last night, and heard plain truths from old Lord Caerleon. He went home staggered, and he came this afternoon to consult with me. He protested vigorously, of course; his principles, his teaching, his convictions, were all against Party. As if that mattered with so young a man! He protested, however, too vigorously; the very strength of his protestation showed that he was weakening. Of course, his pride, which is colossal, and his self-confidence, which is unbounded, prevent his giving in without a struggle. But he will give in, George—he will give in—and we shall have, I believe, a recruit worth fifty of the men that the other side can show. I have never seen any reason to depart from the opinion which I formed at the very outset—that your cousin has in him the very highest possibilities.

'The thing which makes me quite certain of his conversion is that self-interest, which in him means ambition, and pride, and desire for conquest, will be continually prodding and prompting him. It is like the dropping of water upon a stone. I am sure there can be no stronger force, and it is always in action upon every man. It is especially a characteristic of this man. Generally self-interest means money. Not so with your cousin. Dear me! if we take away self-interest, how many noble patriots and great and pious persons would be left? Well, it is for your cousin's interest—looked at from every point of view—that he should join us; and now that he fully understands it—and understands as well that he can never get on without joining us—he swears he will never, never, never do so—standing on the point of honour—as one who, while she swore she'd ne'er consent, consented. Oh, he will come in, as soon as he can square it with his pride.

'You see, he lived alone; he read books; he formed theories; he did not know how things were worked practically; he did not know men and women; and so he got notions in his otherwise sensible pate. He fully intended—which was a very nice thing to intend—to do "great and noble" work—what kind of work that is I cannot tell you—all by himself, which an admiring world would behold, and for which an admiring Premier would ladle out rewards. And, of course, he saw in his dreams the House of Commons looking on, not with eyes of envy, but of wonder and applause, and he heard the papers ringing wedding-bells of praise. It is the one discernible note of his out-of-the-world upbringing and his solitary self-making, that he could seriously entertain this idea, and could imagine himself mounting in this Will-o'-the-wisp fashion to the place of First Lord of the Treasury, and all kinds of sweet things. A most childish dream, and yet in its way the dream of a generous man. He who could imagine a career of this sort cannot be altogether a selfish man. The lower nature, you see, thinks of the reward first and the kind of work afterwards. It does not detract from the higher nature that a man should think of his reward after he has thought of his work. Otherwise he would be more than human. So I do not blame your cousin, but rather respect him the more. A childish dream. I told him so to-day, and I told him why. And an ignorant dream. I told him that as well. He thinks so now; but it shamed him, just for the moment, to confess that he has been all wrong. A man like Robert Burnikel cannot bear to be thought ignorant.

'I had on the table a copy of the *Morning Herald*. It contained a leader against him and his last speech—quite a leader of the old stamp. I had thought the trick of writing such leading articles was gone. Every sentence perverted; every phrase misinterpreted, and made to mean something more, something less, and something different—a masterpiece of party malignity—a leading article, in fact, that cannot fail to do our friend all the good in the world.

'I handed him the paper; he had not yet seen it. Well, you would hardly believe that a real politician could be so young and so foolish. He actually flew into a rage over it; he lost, for a moment, command of himself.

'"My dear friend," I said, "the thing is so exaggerated that I thought you had written it yourself."

'"Written it myself—myself?"

'"Written it yourself. Don't you understand, Mr. Burnikel, that what the young politician wants is plenty of abuse from the other side. There is a story of a certain aged statesman who very kindly advanced a young man of the opposite bench, in whom he took a fatherly interest, by personally abusing him for a whole twelve months. In five years that young man was Chancellor of the Exchequer. Now, if we could only find some good man on the other side to abuse you. It is difficult, but it might be done."

'"Rise through abuse?"

'"Certainly; I will tell you why: First, because it keeps people talking of you, thinking of you, and giving you increased importance in the Party; and next, because the abuse is always grossly exaggerated, and people compare it with your printed utterances. If you were rich enough, you should pay a journalist so much a year to abuse you twice a week."

'He threw down the paper. "Mean artifice!" he cried. "Does this also belong to Party?"

'"You must not take things so seriously, Mr. Burnikel," I said. "It is true that the abuse will in the long-run end in strengthening your position. As for hiring a man, you ought to understand by this time what we mean in earnest, and what in the language which we use to each other."

'"Oh," he cried, "I am an awkward, stupid log!"

'"Never mind, Mr. Burnikel. You are half a nautical person; you shall be the ship's log, which is very good reading, I believe. Now, let us say no more about this article. You must learn to accept these things philosophically. They are all in the day's work. A man who wants to stand on a pinnacle must expect to have dead cats thrown at him. Force of habit, you see, makes the journalist who used to throw dead cats and addled eggs at the man in the pillory now throw them at the man on the pinnacle. They don't hurt—that is, they don't hurt the man who belongs to the Party—they do him good; they only hurt and defile the man who has no Party to protect him, and no friends."

'Eleven o'clock.

'I have just opened a note from him. He has joined us. Yes; the Independent Member has vanished.

'"Dear Lady Frances," he says, "I have thought over what you said this afternoon; you have convinced and converted me. I am now quite sure that the only way of working the machinery of Government is by means of Party. You have shown me that I have been quite wrong. I shall join your Party as one of its private soldiers, and I shall set myself to learn the obedience and discipline of which you spoke."

'There, George; I have converted him. Now, it was not by my arguments at all, but by those of Lord Caerleon, that he was converted. There were all the signs of conviction on his face last night after that conversation. I thought, indeed, of inviting him to sit down on the stool of repentance before the world. But do you think he is capable of confessing himself converted by a man? Never. By a woman, perhaps, although he is too much absorbed in his own ambition to think much about women—never by a man. I am contented, however, with my share of the work. You made your cousin a gentleman, my dear George. You gave him manners. At first, I plainly see, he was probably little better than a self-satisfied prig of the boorish sort—a lower middle-class, prejudiced, book-learned, ignorant prig—yet with wonderful capacities. I shall make him a model statesman of the modern kind. What else can we, between us, do for him?'

Well, my dear Frances,' I said to myself, folding up the letter, 'the next thing you might do for him—if you would, just to oblige me—is to make him a model husband, and so get him out of my way.'

CHAPTER XXII.

A SURPRISE.

And now I have to relate the occurrence of a very surprising incident. It was not only surprising in the way it happened, accompanied by circumstances that have a kind of supernatural appearance, but also in the time when it happened. Had it been earlier or had it been later, this history might never have been written. Had it never happened at all, what might have become of Isabel? And for myself, I might as well have jumped off my own quay into the flowing river, for all the hope or joy of living that would have been left to me. The wonder of the thing is that it was not found out long before. A hundred times and more the place had been searched; an accident might have revealed the secret; a jar, a fall, might have thrown open the hiding-place; a casual cabinet-maker might have found it out had he looked in the right direction. But kindly fate left the discovery to me.

The room allotted to me for a bedroom was that in which old John Burnikel's bare and naked four-poster was standing. When I was first shown the room, it had no other furniture than the four-poster and the old man's sea-chest. They had now clothed the forlorn bedstead, and put in certain chairs and things, so as to make a habitable room of it. The window faced south, and as it was on the second-floor, it looked over the boat-shed upon the river. Here I slept every night in the bed where the old Master Mariner died, quite untroubled by any thoughts about him or the long-lost diamonds, and unvisited by the ghost of their former owner.

It was in the beginning of August, when the nights are still short. Perhaps it was a hot night; perhaps there was more noise of passing steamers from the river than usual—the Silent Highway is generally much noisier than Cheapside by night, as well as by day. Whatever the cause, I woke up, starting suddenly into wakefulness. It was early dawn, but the light was rapidly increasing. My blind was up, my curtains drawn, my window wide open. I lay lazily watching the sky in the south grow lighter—gray at first, and then suffused with some of the eastern glow—a tender, subdued glow like the colour on Isabel's cheek, which so quickly comes and goes—the tell-tale glow. Perhaps, had I not begun to think about Isabel, I might have gone to sleep again, in which case this thing would not have happened.

The gray hues passed away, the rosy hues passed away; there remained the clear deep blue of early morning before the smoke begins, when the sky may be like the sky of Africa for clearness and for depth, and when the river, with its bridges and its boats, all asleep in silence, save for the wish and wash of the ebb and flow, is an enchanted stream.

Presently I closed my eyes again. Contrary to reasonable expectation, I did not go to sleep again. It was that kind of hopeless wakefulness which makes sleep past praying for. I insist upon this point on account of what followed, which was not a dream, for I was awake; but a kind of vision, and only remarkable because it coincided with the discovery which followed.

Do not suppose that I attribute this vision to any supernatural interference. Nothing of the kind. Neither the ancient mariner, the master mariner, nor the unfortunate nabob of whose existence I first learned in the vision, ever appeared to me or afflicted me with terrors. I have never been in the least afraid of ghosts. Had old John Burnikel come to my bedside, I would have had the secret of the diamonds out of him before I let him go, as sure as my name is George Burnikel. But he never came; he made no sign. I think he must have forgotten in the other world all about his diamonds; his ghost never once appeared to me. Had it done so, I would have had the great secret, I say, out of him in no time. 'Ghost,' I should have said, 'where are those diamonds? Who stole them? What is the truth about them? If they were stolen, and have long since been dispersed, let me know. If they still remain to be discovered, somewhere or other, tell me where they are. I adjure thee, I command thee, by all the charms and spells that you ghosts are fools enough to dread, tell me where those diamonds are.'

That is what I should have said. But the only man I know who ever claimed to have raised a ghost—and that was also the ghost of a sailor—told me that he was only too glad to let him go back again below, below, below, and that, though as brave as most, he did not dare to ask any questions. I don't believe a word of it. However, ghosts are scarce; perhaps I should have behaved in the same manner. And this, I take it, is the case with most; otherwise we should know more about certain things whose uncertainty is sometimes disagreeable. All you have to do is to raise your ghost and not be afraid of him. There was no ghost, and yet the air seemed this morning full of the

Burnikel legend. There was the sound of a ship slowly making her way up the river—a Hamburg or Norwegian steamer, perhaps. One is never allowed perfect calm at Wapping. I lay on my back in the old wooden four-poster, which they had fitted with a spring mattress instead of a feather bed, and I recalled the wonderful story: how the old man one night displayed his bag of precious stones, worth anything you please; how he told the cousins it would be theirs; how, a day or two afterwards, he was found dying, and told them collectively that they knew where the bag was kept; how they did not know, but searched and could not find it, and accused each other, and fought and separated.

I lay on my back recalling this odd story, which was chiefly interesting because it was a story without an end.

Another interest it might have, if one were to consider how John Burnikel got those diamonds, because the old man's romance of the Great Mogul and the invitation to fill his pockets in the Royal Treasure Vaults was clearly too ridiculous; it was so very plainly invented with intent to deceive.

The first thing that happened after this awaking was a vision. It was a very odd vision. To begin with, I was not asleep. To this day I cannot understand how this vision, of all others, came to me. One never dreams original plots of novels; quite new stories never come to anyone; and this story, except for one little half-forgotten circumstance, was quite new. Some novelists have pretended that their plots habitually come to them in dreams, but I do not believe it. Dreams and visions are erratic, incoherent, and unconnected things for the most part. That makes my vision all the more remarkable.

I suppose I must have dropped into some kind of bodily torpor. I am sure I was not asleep, because all through the business I knew that I was lying on the bed, although the action of the piece, so to speak, was elsewhere. However that may be, it is really useless to explain or account for a vision. The one that came to me was, so to speak, a magnified and embroidered piece of work, springing from something that Isabel had once told me. Why, I had quite forgotten it. She was talking about her people, who were no more illustrious in station than my own; and she informed me that once there was a strange man among them who had run away to sea, and come home again in rags twenty years later, raving about a fortune he had lost in India. Nothing more than that. A very slight material of which to construct a vision. Yet it came, and as long as I live I shall believe that the vision was somehow a revelation of the truth sent to me just before the great discovery.

It began by my stepping out of the house—but I knew all along that I was in the bed—and walking down the narrow lane leading out of the High Street to Wapping Old Stairs. There I found, sitting on the stairs, an elderly gentleman dressed in clothes extremely shabby. He wore a coat of brown cloth, he had worsted stockings, hat frayed and worn at the edge—quite a poor man he seemed to be. From his dress it was evident that he belonged to the eighteenth century, which I like to consider a picturesque period.

He sat upon the top step of Wapping Old Stairs, and he looked across the river; and as he gazed the tears ran down his face.

It is not often that one gets the chance of talking to a man of the eighteenth century, but it seemed not unnatural. I sat down beside him as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

'What, sir,' I asked timidly, 'is the cause of this grief?'

He sighed heavily. 'My diamonds!' he said, 'my diamonds!'

'What diamonds? I am a stranger to your time, worthy sir, and I know nothing of your diamonds.'

'What troubles me,' he said, 'is that I think I must have lost my soul in getting them together, in which case I have thrown away my soul for nothing.'

'Dear me, sir, this is serious indeed.'

'Yes, young man, they were amassed by scraping and grinding, and squeezing and skinning. Never were people ground down more miserably; and it was I who did it in my master's service—in the service of the devil, I think. And now I have lost the diamonds as well. What have I got in exchange for my soul?'

I ought to have thought of John Burnikel at this point, but I did not.

'Tell me more about the diamonds,' I said.

'Once I was a Nabob,' he began, fetching a sigh as deep as an Artesian well.

'Really? A Nabob? I thought a Nabob had a carriage and four, and troops of servants.'

'Once I was a Nabob.' Then he stopped and looked around him suspiciously. The watermen lay asleep in their boats. It was a Sunday afternoon in summer. The ships were moored in long lines down the river from London Bridge, which we could not see for the bend, down to the Lower Pool. 'Is there no one here but yourself?' he whispered.

'No one; and I belong to the next century.'

'So you do. And you can't lock me up in a madhouse, can you? Oh, it's dreadful to be in a madhouse when you are not mad! Horrible! They knock you about! they starve you! they abuse you! they chain you up—when you are not mad at all. Young man, never, if you can possibly help it, lock up anyone in a madhouse.'

I promised him that I would not.

'They put me in on account of these lost diamonds. They said I was mad.'

'What diamonds, then?'

'Sir, it relieves my grief to tell the cause. I was one of those unlucky youths who cannot remain at home and do what the others do. I had to run away when I was fourteen to prevent being apprenticed to some vile trade—saddlery, I believe. So I ran away and went to sea; and when we got to Calcutta, because the Captain was a brute, and the mate was a brute, and the bo's'n was a brute, I ran away from the ship, and went up country, and entered the service of a native Prince. And him I served for twenty years and more—served well—squeezed and ground and skinned his people for him. And I got rich in his service, for he gave me great presents. I told you—I was once a Nabob. Great presents he gave me, though he was a devil.'

'Very good, so far.'

'When he let me go I carried down to Calcutta all my treasure in jewels and gold pieces. I bought jewels, of which I understood the value very well, with my money, and put them in a bag with what I had already—a long, narrow canvas bag—and put the bag in a leathern belt, where it could not be seen. And then I took passage in a homeward bound, with all my fortune upon my person, worn night and day, in that narrow leathern belt. Lots of people brought treasure home from India that way. It was thought a safe way.'

'Well?'

He sighed heavily. ‘On the voyage,’ he resumed, ‘I believe soon after sailing, I was taken ill: it was brain-fever, sunstroke, or something. When I came to myself again I was on shore—brought ashore and taken to Bedlam because I was still disordered in my wits with my fever, or my sunstroke.’

‘Oh! You were taken to Bedlam.’

‘I was taken to Bedlam and kept there—I don't know how long. When they let me go, and I remembered things, the belt was gone—the belt with the diamonds was gone, I say!’

‘Who took it?’

‘I don't know. Some sailor on the ship, perhaps; the keepers at Bedlam, perhaps. So I went home to my own people, who lived at Canterbury, and were saddlers. And when I went home in rags, they drove me out, and when I raved about my diamonds, they locked me up again in another madhouse.’

All this time I never thought of old John Burnikel at all.

‘That was very unlucky. What was the name of the ship?’ I asked him.

‘I cannot remember; I have never been able to remember.’

‘Or of the captain?’

‘I cannot remember.’

‘What is your own name? Can you remember that?’

‘Samuel Dering.’

‘Oh! Are you by any accident related to Captain Dering, and Isabel, his daughter, both living in the year 1895?’

‘They will be my great-grand-nephew and great-great-grand-niece.’

'Then they ought to have the diamonds, if they were found?'

'Certainly they ought. I give them to Isabel. Please tell her so.'

'And the name of the captain — was it John Burnikel?'

'It was!' He sprang to his feet. 'Captain Burnikel it was! Where is he? where is he?'

'Dead, my friend—dead for nearly ninety years—as dead as you yourself.'

He looked at me reproachfully, and the vision vanished. I was lying in the old man's bed and gazing at the sky. It was an odd trick of the brain, more especially as I had never heard any hint or suggestion of the kind. But at this moment I believe that I dreamed the truth, and that old John Burnikel simply cut the belt from the waist of a passenger gone mad for the time with sunstroke, or some other cause. The passenger recovered after landing, but could not remember the name of the ship or the captain, and he was the great-grandfather of Isabel.

Nothing in the story at all, except for the accident which followed.

My eyes fell upon the sea-chest. It was a large iron-bound trunk—the sea-chest of an officer, not a common sailor, who is only allowed, I believe, a sea-bag.

The more I looked at that chest, the more I thought about the unfortunate Nabob turning all his fortune into precious stones, and tying them up in a canvas bag worn as a belt. The vision, I repeat, was so clear, the words were so plain, that I had not the least doubt about the truth of the thing. John Burnikel had grown rich suddenly by robbing a sick man of his fortune. No one suspected him; no one can trace gems unless they are very large indeed; no one thought that he possessed any precious stones till the last year of a very long life, and then he accounted for their possession by a cock-and-bull story. Had the injured man, this poor ruined Nabob, found him out, he could bring no charge against him, for he had no kind of proof. And then an irresistible desire seized me to search the chest once more on my own account. It had been ransacked, I knew, time after time by Robert and his predecessors. Never mind; I must look for myself.

So I sprang out of bed, and dragging the box out of the corner into the middle of the room, I threw open the lid and began to search, taking out the contents slowly one by one.

The chest had been left just as it was since the old man's death. Nothing had been taken away, only it had been searched a hundred times; every separate member of the family had searched it over and over again for three generations in hopes of finding that lost fortune. But in vain. And now it was my turn.

The chest certainly contained a collection which showed travel. It was divided into two unequal compartments, one about two feet six long, and the other about eighteen inches. Both compartments were provided with a tray about two and a half inches deep. The things in the chest were not arranged in order, but just lay about, one on the other, piled up, just as they were thrown in by the last who examined the contents. The things were not such as we should now call rare; they consisted of curios brought from voyages in the Far East and sea-going things of the time. Thus, an ancient rusty flint and steel pistol belonged to the sailor. An Oriental dagger must have been picked up in some native shop of Calicut or Bombay. The mariner's compass, the roll of charts, the telescope, the sextant, the large silver watch, belonged to the sailor; so, I suppose, did a mummified flying-fish, which still preserved something of its ancient salt-sea smell; a carved sandal-wood box; one or two Oriental pipes; a large figure of Buddha, or somebody else, looking supremely wise and philosophic—or perhaps theosophic; certain silk handkerchiefs, mostly eaten by moths; slippers in gilt leather; a book of Hindoo pictures, ugly and fleshly; one or two things in mother-of-pearl; half a dozen gold rings; twenty or thirty silver bangles tied together. All these things spoke of the Eastern traveller, and, a hundred years ago, would be thought curious.

The first thing that made me jump was a leathern belt lying at the bottom of the box. A leathern belt! Why, it confirmed, I thought, that strange story concerning the fever-stricken passenger. He had his leathern belt. Well, but anybody may have a leathern belt. And this was quite a common thing—a broad strap with a buckle, black with wear or with age. I took it out and examined it. Now, which was a very remarkable coincidence, the leather was double; it could be pulled open along the upper line, and there was room within for just such a long slim bag as was described by my imaginary Nabob. I passed my fingers along the whole length of this curious double belt—the secret-holding belt. No, there were no jewels left.

Nothing more was in the box of the least importance. All the things lay on the floor beside the box; the thing itself, with its lid wide open, stood below the window, the full light falling into its two compartments. As you know, I am a fairly good hand at a lathe, and I am by trade a practical boat-builder—a craftsman; my eye is therefore trained. Now, as I looked into the empty chest, thinking about that belt, I perceived that, at the back of the chest in the larger compartment, the longer side was not quite at right angles with the bottom of the chest. The difference was very slight—an inclination of a very few degrees from the right angle; still, it was there, and to a practised eye quite visible. But in the smaller compartment the right angle left nothing to be desired; it was a true right angle. Was this accidental? I lifted the chest, and changed its position. Yes; there could be no doubt about the inclination of the lower two inches all along the back of the larger compartment. I turned the box over; the back was perfectly rectangular. But here, again, I observed a curious point. The chest was solidly built: the wood was thick all over; but the wood of the back was two inches thick. Why had they taken such extraordinary precautions to strengthen the chest? And then a strange sense of excitement fell upon me, because I was now quite certain that all these signs meant something which I was going to discover.

The chest was lined with paper of a pattern which contained, at intervals of four or five inches, a black thick line; one of these lines occurred just above the beginning of the angle. The effect of the line was, of course, to darken the part just above and just below. Now, when I looked narrowly into the place, I fancied that I saw below the line another, which looked as if it was a solution of the continuity. Two inches below, at the very bottom of the chest, there was a mark of some kind, but not that of a solution of the continuity.

A practical man in the boat-building trade never goes about, even in his bedroom, without a good strong jack-knife—one that will serve many purposes, if necessary. I found mine, and I tested this apparent juncture. Yes; the blade penetrated easily. I passed it along the box, backwards and forwards; the wood creaked, being old and dry. What was the meaning of this slit? I turned the knife round. The wood slowly gave way, and this part of the box grindingly and grudgingly opened. It turned on creaking hinges, being kept in place by two rusty springs. I dragged it quite open with my fingers. It was a long, narrow, slightly-curved shutter, fitting tightly to the side of the box at a small angle almost imperceptible. Behind, the thick wood of the box had been hollowed out; and thus a secret cupboard was found, the existence of which would never be suspected.

In that narrow recess lay the thing for which everybody had been searching for nearly a hundred years—the cause of the cousins' quarrel and separation: the long narrow bag of brown canvas stuff, like one of the old-fashioned purses, only open at the end instead of the middle.

With a beating heart I took it out. The narrow brown canvas bag, just as the ruined Nabob had told me! Did he appear just then in order to tell me? I laid it on the bed. It was tied very tightly with string at one end. There were things in it. What things?

I threw the bag on the bed and leaned out of the window. The morning air was fresh; the sun was bright; the river—I could see it over the boat-shed—danced in the sunlight and the breeze. I sat there for some time—I know not how long—my brain running away with me, filled with confused murmurs as of people all talking together: the original Robert and George clamouring for a division; old John himself telling us how the great Eastern King bade him fill his pockets and fear not; the poor old ragged Nabob sitting on Wapping Old Stairs in order to bewail his loss; and Isabel whispering that I should be better without these diamonds. A curious jumble of voices and of thoughts.

Perhaps it was not, after all, the bag of diamonds.

I left the window. I dared to put the thing to the proof; I cut the string with my knife, and I poured out the contents upon the sheet of the open bed.

Heavens! what a shower was that which descended! Danaë herself never saw so fine a sight. They fell in a small cascade of splendid light and colour—diamond, pearl, emerald, ruby, sapphire, jasper, topaz, beryl, opal, hyacinth, turquoise, agate, every conceivable gem poured out of the long sack—two feet six long and three inches broad—and there they lay before me in a heap, glittering in the morning light. There were thousands of stones, large and small; not rough stones, but all cut and polished.

I had found the old man's precious hoard. What they were worth I could not imagine, nor have I ever learned. Only to amass such an immense sum in the service of an Eastern Prince in twenty years must, I should imagine, as the Nabob hinted, be extremely dangerous to the welfare of the soul.

I ran my fingers through the pile. I played with the pretty things. I threw them up to watch the light playing on them as they fell. I rolled them over and over. Then began various temptations. I am not ashamed to confess to very elementary suggestions that I should 'sneak' those jewels. Said the voice of the Tempter: 'Nobody knows what you have found. Take the stones and go back to Piccadilly. There will be heaps and heaps for you to live upon in that bag as long as you are likely to live, and afterwards. Piccadilly is much more pleasant than Wapping. Boatbuilding is a mean, mechanical craft. Remember that you belong to that end of town. This is a Providential occasion; it is sent to you on purpose to restore you to your old position.'

To this Tempter—I don't know why he took the trouble to come at all—one could easily find a reply. 'Sir,' I said, with dignity, 'you do not know to whom you are speaking. Go away, sir. Go to the Devil, sir!'

The second Tempter said, 'Why, just as this treasure would have belonged to the original Robert and George had they found it, so it belongs to the new Robert and George, now that they have found it. Call him in quickly, and share it with him. Halves. That will give you both plenty to live upon.'

To which I made answer on reflection: 'My grandfather had brothers and sisters. They went down in the world while he went up. I have cousins somewhere who have as much right to the inheritance as I myself. And Robert has brothers and sisters—no doubt, cousins as well. The inheritance belongs to them as well as to Robert. If every one of us has his share, there will not be much left.'

Then said the Tempter: 'Why tell the far-off unknown cousins anything about it? Probably they are much better without their share; much best for most men to keep poor: they are out of temptation. Besides, there is not too much to be divided between you and Robert. You will be able to go back to the West End; it's a much more pleasant life. Here you will vegetate and grow stupid; your manners will fall from you; your ideas will grow sordid, like your business. Better go

West again, and stay there. You will never again get such a chance. Boat-building is a mean, mechanical craft.'

'You, too,' I said, with a struggle, 'may go to your own place, wherever that may be.'

I put back the stones in their bag. I closed the shutter; I filled the chest with its contents. I closed the lid, and pushed the chest back into the corner. Then I lay down on the bed and fell fast asleep.

When I awoke it was past six, and the life on the river had long since begun. Had I dreamed? At first I thought so. The dream of the unfortunate Nabob and his narrative was just as vivid as the dream of finding the diamonds. Fired with this thought, I sprang out of bed and tore open the box; yes, along the bottom ran that thin line which I had opened with my knife. I doubted no longer.

I had found the diamonds.

I dressed quickly and hurried down to the river, where I went out for a pull in one of our own boats—'Burnikel and Burnikel.' The exercise and the fresh air set my brain right. I was able to see the thing in its true light: namely, the find did not affect me at all. For nearly ninety years that sea-chest had been in the possession of the tenant of the house. Robert received it as part of his inheritance; to him, as to the eldest, the family house and the family business; to the others, a small sum of money each and the wide, wide world. The chest was Robert's, with all its contents; just as the old man's bed was Robert's, and all the furniture of the house was his.

After breakfast the Captain retired to his own room. Isabel and I were left alone. She proceeded, according to her wont, to wash up the teacups; it is an ancient, homely custom among old-fashioned housewives, and belongs to a time when china was dear and very precious.

'You look serious, George,' she said. 'Has anything important happened?'

'Something very important.'

'Is it anything that will take you away from this place?'

Then I looked around and considered this maiden, how sweet and good she was, and how much simpler and sweeter than the girls of society; and how lovely she was, especially when the colour, like the dainty delicate bloom of the peach, rose to her cheek. And how she loved me—that I knew; and how I was bent upon taking her away from her cold, unloving *fiancé;* and how she would never find any place in society where she would be happy; and how I could not live without her.

Of course, the chest belonged absolutely to Robert—the chest and all that it contained.

'No, Isabel, nothing will ever happen that will take me from your presence unless you command me to go.'

Despite my promise, some such words would fly out from time to time. My excuse is that I was thinking continually how to effect Isabel's release.

She made no reply, but went on washing up the cups and saucers.

'Isabel,' I said, remembering the tearful Nabob, 'do you remember telling me about a certain member of your family who came home from India and always raved about a lost fortune? Where did your people come from?'

'They lived at Canterbury once.' That was where the Nabob went. 'I do not know how long they lived there.'

'And about that man coming from India? Do you know anything about the fortune that he lost?'

'There was a man once—I have heard my great-grandfather, who lived to a very old age, speak of his uncle, who was a very strange man. He had been abroad, and he was wandering in his wits, and used to sit down and cry over a lost fortune, which he said was in a belt. That is all I know about him. My great-grandfather always said that he believed in the loss of the fortune. But why do you ask?'

'Only because I dreamed about him last night. Odd, wasn't it? Dreamed that he sat on the steps, and wept over his lost fortune.'

'You dreamed about him? About my great-great-uncle, of whom you have heard that strange thing!'

'Yes. It's a strange world. I dreamed about him. I will tell you some day—soon—what I dreamed. It's a very strange world indeed, Isabel. And the most wonderful things get found out, years and years and years after they have been done and forgotten.'

Then, for reasons of my own, I resolved to tell no one about the diamonds for the present. One or two things had to be done before Robert should learn of his recovered inheritance.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MAN OF SOCIETY.

NEVER before, I am quite sure, was transformation more rapid than that which changed the Hon. Member for Shadwell in less than six months from a man out of the world to a man of the world. In April he came to my chambers and introduced himself. Before the end of the season he was in the House, in a West End Club, in Society. He was a rising young man of the Party; the leaders were civil to him; he knew a good many people; he was listened to in the House; he wrote a paper in the Vacation about some branches of the Labour Question to the *Contemporary Review;* he also read a paper on some statistics before a learned society; he attended in August a Congress of working men and told them truths. I believe he distributed prizes at a Sunday-school in his Borough. In one way or another the papers were continually talking about him. Now, the first step in the noble art of getting on is to keep your name well before the public; everybody understands that. You must make people talk about you. And since people's memories are most miserably short, you must do something else very soon to make them talk about you again. The effect of this forced familiarity is that when the promotion comes nobody is in the least astonished. I think, for my own part, that he was artfully and secretly managed all this time; I have my suspicions as to the person who pulled the strings. As for myself, he was incapable of *réclame!* The people who pulled the strings and made him dance and made the world talk about him sat in the background or in the underground. Nobody knows what an enormous political cellarage there is!

This was his life. It changed him completely in six months. He was always a man of presence. He was now in appearance a gentleman of sixteen quarterings at least; the aristocracy of Castile could produce no scion of nobler figure. Anyone, however, may have the appearance of a gentleman. Robert had acquired, in addition, the manner and the speech of one who has always lived with gentlefolk, so that their manners have become his own by a kind of instinct. I suppose he acquired these manners easily because he had so little to unlearn. A man who has lived alone among books can hardly have incurable habits. I do not say that he talked as a man of his age belonging to public school life, college life, or the army, would talk. No outsider can possibly acquire that manner of speech.

'Your cousin, George,' said Frances, 'reminds me of a certain courteous gentleman of Virginia whom I met some years ago. There was an old-world courtesy about him; he was a gentleman, but not of our stamp; he was conscious of his rank and manners, he thought of both very much, and I should say that he lived among people very much unlike him. Robert reminds me of him. Nobody would deny that he is a man of fine, of rather studied, manners; nobody would deny that he is a gentleman, yet not one of us. He is to spend a fortnight with me at Beau Séjour'—this was her country-house—'in September. He grows apace, George.'

'He is a lucky man, Frances. You have taken him up and advanced him.'

'He is more than lucky. Anybody may be lucky. He is strong.'

When the House rose, about the third week of August, and all the world went out of town, he came home to the house and the dockyard. I looked to see him fall back upon the old life: work in the yard all day, and sit in his study all the evening. He did nothing of the kind. He moved about restlessly, he came to the yard and looked at the work in progress, but without interest. He received the ordinary business communications without interest. He had still a share in the house, yet he behaved as if he no longer cared even to hear what was done. I suppose he had grown out of the work. Strange! And it was just as I was growing into it, feeling the sense of struggle and competition, which gives its living interest to all forms of trade.

One day he was sitting in the yard, looking out upon the river. The men had gone; it was past five o'clock. The day was cloudy, and a driving rain fell upon the river, which looked gray, and stormy, and threatening.

'This is a horrible place to live in!' he said abruptly. 'It is more horrible than it used to be!'

'Come, you lived in it yourself for a long time.'

'But I always knew that it was a horrible place; one couldn't help knowing that. I always intended to get away. Man, if I had known only a tenth part of the pleasures of that other life, I should have been devoured with the rage and fierceness of discontent. I say it is a horrible place—cribbed, cabined, and confined! With whom can you talk? With the Captain and Isabel. George, how can you do it? How could you bring yourself to do it—you who know the other life? I don't understand it. You who know that incomparable woman! Why, now that I do know it, rather than leave it I would go out and rob upon the highway!'

'You like that other life so much? Strange!'

'Why is it strange? It is the only life worth leading. You taught me to like it when you taught me what it meant. I should otherwise have been outside everything all my life.'

'I am not the only one who taught you, Robert.'

'No; there is Lady Frances. Well, I owe it to you that I have learned what a woman may be. I owe it to you. How could I know before to what heights a woman could rise? Good heavens! how could I know?'

'Very little, truly. You remember, however, that you never gave yourself the trouble to inquire into the subject.'

'I had no chance. There is a woman—clever, accomplished, full of resource, of gracious manners. Good heavens, George! And you could go away, leave her, and come down here!'

'Beautiful too, if you ever think about beauty,' I added calmly.

'I never do when I am in her society.' He meant well, though the compliment was doubtful. He intended to explain that the charm of her conversation was so great that he could think of nothing else.

'Some men think her extremely beautiful—I do myself. You may remember, also, that she is well born and rich.'

'I would rather not remember those points,' he said shortly. 'I would rather not remember that there are any barriers between us.'

'Are good birth and fortune barriers? Not always. However, there is one barrier of your own making, Robert. She is sitting in the house over the way at this minute.'

He took up a handful of chips and began to throw them into the river one by one, with gloomy countenance. 'A barrier of your own making, Robert. I suppose you can unmake it if you like?'

'My word is passed.'

'You belong to society now, you much-promoted person. When you marry, your wife must belong to society as well, or you will have to go out of it. Do you think that Isabel is ready to take her place in the world of society as well as, say, Lady Frances?'

Robert, to those who knew him, betrayed any strong emotion by the quick change in his face. It was disgust, plain disgust, which crossed his face when I put this question.

'Isabel,' I went on relentlessly, 'is a girl with many graces.'

'I have never seen any,' he said.

'Of great beauty, of great delicacy of mind, sweet and gentle.'

'So is a doll.'

'You have never even tried to discover the soul of the girl whom you have promised to marry. I know her a great deal better than you.' That, at least, was quite true, yet not exactly as he thought. 'The point is whether she has the training and the knowledge required by a great lady in society; and I am quite certain, Robert, that she has not.'

'My word is passed; but'—he threw all the rest of the chips into the stream and got up—'I am not going to marry yet awhile—not for a very long while yet.'

'Well, but consider—is it right?'

'Does she want to marry somebody else, then? Let her speak to me if she does. And how can I talk of marrying yet?' he added irritably. 'Nobody knows better than you what my resources are; and I haven't got my foot upon the lowest round of the ladder yet.'

'Let Isabel go, then.'

'I have passed my word.'

I said no more. It is always a pity to say too much. We went over the way and had tea.

The day after this conversation he addressed his constituents, not defending or excusing his conduct in ceasing to be an Independent Member, but giving them his reasons in a lordly and condescending manner, which I believe pleased these honest fellows much better than if he had fawned upon them. Who would not wish to be represented by a man who had opinions of his own, rather than by one who pretended to accept the imaginary opinions of the mob? 'You fellows haven't got any opinions,' said Robert, standing on the platform. 'I have. You send me to represent my own opinions, which you know, and not yours, which you don't know. Opinion! How can fifty men be said to have an opinion? Well, you all hold certain opinions that belong to simple law and order. You know that politicians are necessary. You think that rich men get too rich. You sometimes think that there ought to be work and wages for everybody. Some of you allow yourselves to think what is foolishness: that wages ought to be always going up. What is the good of such an opinion as that?' And so on, telling them very plainly that he thought nothing at all of their intellects. And they liked it.

After a week, during which we saw very little indeed of him, he went away again, with scant leave-taking. He carried away with him all his possessions—his books, his papers, and all; so that it was manifest that he meant to return no more. In fact, he came again once and only once, as you shall hear.

'Has he said anything, Isabel?' I asked anxiously.

'Not a single word. I was horribly afraid that he would. Not one word.'

'It is wonderful,' I said, looking upon this sweet and lovely maiden. 'Well, Isabel, the day of redemption draweth nigh. Yet but a little while, and I shall knock the fetters from your feet, and you shall be free to fly—to soar—to scale the very heavens in the joy of your freedom.'

So we were left alone again, having the quiet house, so quiet when all the workmen had gone home, all to ourselves, with the Captain to take care of us. It was not an unhappy time, despite that betrothal which I fain would snap asunder; partly because we were together, and partly because I was certain that the promise must be broken as soon as Robert understood himself a little better. The evenings grew too short for more than a sail on the river; then too short for that. We spent them at home, by ourselves. Isabel discovered that I could sing; or she played to me with a soft and sympathetic touch, which made me dream things unutterable. On Saturday afternoons we went to picture galleries and to theatres and concerts—always somewhere. On Sunday morning, if it was fine, we went to St. Paul's, or Westminster, or the Temple, where the voices are sweet and pure and the singing is regulated. When it was wet, we went to St. John's, our own parish church, and sat under the tablets of the Burnikels. I never really enjoyed family pride at the West End; here, on the spot, one felt every inch a Burnikel. We were like Paul and Virginia, and Paul was a most enviable person. I had brought my lathe from Piccadilly and set it up in the study, and Isabel would sit reading while I made the splinters fly; or we read together. I read aloud while she worked, or she read aloud while I took a pipe; or, best of all, she sat opposite me while I had that pipe and talked—talked of things pure, and sweet, and heavenly, insomuch that the hearts of those who heard flowed within them. At such time I loved to turn the lamp low, so that the sweet face of my mistress might be lit and coloured by the red fire in the grate or the lamp in the street. And all this time, during August and September, not a word from Robert.

It was for his sake, in order to advise him, that

Frances continued in town till the end of August, and when she went down to her country-house he went, too, as one of her party.

'Your cousin,' she wrote, 'is staying here. He does not go out with the men shooting. I suppose that he cannot shoot. He works in the library; he has brought some books of his own here. He is writing a little series of three letters for the *Times* on one of his own subjects. He has read them to me first. I find them admirably expressed and models of good sense. He grows every day, George; his head will one day touch the skies. He still lacks the one grace that will complete his oratory if he arrives at it—the grace of lightness. He can be light and humorous on occasion, but his general tone is serious. It is a seriousness which sits well upon a young man, because in this age of badinage and cynicism no one is serious, except Robert himself, who looks as serious as a Dean. There is also something on his mind. I do not suppose it is the want of money, because you told me something about his affairs, and I believe that he has a few hundreds. It is not disappointment, because no young man has ever got on so well in so short a time since the days of Pitt. I think he will be Pitt the Third. In that case you will see him in the Cabinet in four or five years at the outside. It is not that he feels himself out of his element in this country-house, which is, I suppose, rather a finer house than the one you have at Wapping. Nothing dazzles him—neither wealth, nor troops of servants, nor titles, nor women in grand frocks, nor diamonds. What, then, is the matter with him? If he were another kind of man, he would long since have got himself sent away by making love to me. As you know, George, I am always sending them away for this very sufficient cause. But this man does not make love. What is on his mind? You who know him may be able to advise upon this subject. The symptoms are a tendency to the gathering of a sudden cloud upon the face; a disposition of the mind to wander away, out of sight, so to speak; a sudden looking forth of the eyes into space. He is thinking of something disagreeable. It cannot be his past, because he is no more ashamed of having been a boat-builder than you are of becoming one; though what is honest self-respect in one case is disgraceful abandonment of caste in the other. What can it be? I suspect—nay, I am sure—that there is some woman in the case. Has he early in youth made a fool of himself with an unworthy woman? Has he trammelled himself? Is he, perchance, a married man, and married to Awfulness and Terribleness? Oh, the having to marry such women! I am very much concerned upon this point, George. Let me know about it, if you can. Don't try to screen him if he wants any screening. I think so much of him, I tell you beforehand, that I would forgive him if I could. Only there are some things which must not be forgiven.

'I am not going to stay here after October, when I shall return to town and to dear, delightful politics, and to you, my dear George, if you can tear yourself from your abominable chips and come to see me. Have you developed more callosities on your hands?—F.'

What was on Robert's mind? Well, I think I could tell her. But should I? Would it be best to tell her?

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN EXPLANATION.

It was about the middle of October that Frances came up from the country. Considering that her uniform practice was to remain there until the middle of January every year, it was reasonable to suppose that there was some urgent cause why she returned so soon.

Perhaps she would tell me. It was her general custom to tell me everything. For instance, when her marriage, at the age of eighteen, with an elderly Secretary of State, was under consideration, we talked it over together, weighing the arguments for and against it, dispassionately, which we could very well do, because Frances was not in love with the elderly statesman, though she greatly admired him, and we were not in love with each other.

I called upon her on Sunday morning, a time when I should be certain to find her quite alone. She received me in her breakfast-room. I observed that her face showed certain signs of trouble, or, at least, uneasiness of some kind. It was in her eyes chiefly, eyes remarkable for their serenity, that the trouble was shown. There was a dark line under them, and her forehead, the forehead remarkable for its sunshine, looked clouded.

'You are not well, Frances?'

'I am always well, George. Sit down and tell me all about yourself.'

'I have got nothing to tell you about myself; but I will tell you, if you please, about Isabel.'

I proceeded to tell her, at length, a great deal about Isabel. Of course, Frances would not believe that a girl could be refined, and graceful, and well mannered, who was living at Wapping, the daughter of a skipper.

'You tell me to believe all this of such a girl, George. It is absurd. Where would the girl find these graces? Believe me, a refined and well-bred girl is a most artificial product. It takes the greatest watchfulness and the most careful companionship to create refinement in a girl—a refined and well-bred girl is not in the least a creature of Nature, nor, I should suppose, of Wapping.'

'I cannot tell you where she found her refinement, Frances. I suppose, where she found her sweet face and her soft voice and her tender eyes.'

'George, you are a lover. Oh! it must be beautiful to be a man, if only for the man's power of imagination. I fear your angel would be to me a Common Object.'

'No, Frances. Have I not known you all my life? This privilege is an education. Do you think that, after going through such a school of manners, I could be capable of falling in love with a Common Object?'

'It is prettily said, George. I half believe you on the strength of that pretty little speech. Since she appears to you all these things, I can only hope that she is really all these things. You must take me to see her. Only, you know, men who fall in love do sometimes permit themselves the most crazy fancies. It makes them happy, poor dears, and I suppose it does no harm to the woman. I dare say she doesn't even understand what the man thinks about her. Well, and you are engaged, and you are going to be married. When?'

'Here comes the trouble. We are not engaged. And we cannot become engaged.'

'Why not?'

'On account of Robert.'

'Oh!' She blushed quickly. 'Then, there is a woman, after all. What about Robert?'

'Four or five years ago, when she came with her father to live with him and to keep his accounts, he told her that some time or other he should want a wife, and that he should marry her. There was to be no wooing, he said, and there has been no love-making ever since. He has never addressed a word of love-making to her.'

'Well? And why can't the girl let him go? She must feel that she is a clog upon him.'

Frances spoke more harshly than was customary with her.

'Robert says that he has passed his word. Isabel says that she owes everything to Robert, and that she is bound by common gratitude to wait for him until he releases her. She will obey him in all things. If he says "Marry me," she will marry him. If he says "Wait," she will wait. If he says "Go," she will go.'

'Gratitude of this kind, George, is touching, but it may be embarrassing. What does Robert say?'

'Robert says that he has passed his word. But he also says that it will be long years before he can think of marrying her. I have tried to make him understand that it is cruel to keep a girl on like this.'

'Does he love her? Oh, I cannot think he does. I have watched him while he was thinking of her. I knew it was a woman, and I knew he had got into some kind of scrape with a woman. Men who are in love do not glare and glower when they think of the object of their affections.'

'Does he love her?' I repeated, rising, and looking out of the window. 'Nobody can answer that question, Frances, better than you.'

It was a bold thing to say; but one must sometimes say bold things. I remained at the window, looking out upon the Park, but I saw nothing.

Frances made no reply.

I came back and resumed my seat.

'What do you want to do, George?'

'I want Robert to release her.'

'Tell him so, then.'

'I know what he would say. I have told him so already. He says that his word is given. Isabel has assured him that she will wait for him. Isabel has always been so gentle, even meek, with him, that he would understand with difficulty that she would, in fact, rather not.'

'Well, what do you propose, then?'

'I would try to work upon his ambitions. There is no doubt that poor Isabel, who has no social ambitions, would be a clog upon him. Seeing what kind of man he is, and the future that lies before him, would it be provident for him to hamper himself with a wife who can never belong to your world?'

'It would be madness.'

'Well, Frances, you have taken a very kind interest in him from the first.'

'For your sake, George; you know that.'

'It was for my sake at the outset; now, I hope and believe, you continue your interest in him for his own sake.'

She coloured. Thus doth guilt betray itself. Had she taken no such personal interest in the man, there would have been no cause for the mantling soft suffusion. It really was very pretty. Whatever softened Frances's regal beauty improved the attraction of it.

'After all,' she said, 'the girl must be an incomparable nymph to have conquered two such men.

However, Robert must not marry a girl of humble rank—at least, for a very long time to come. When he stands quite firmly, and has secured his position—but even then it would be madness.'

'If he were to marry the right kind of woman it would be different. He should have in a wife, first good connections, then social position, then some measure of wealth.'

Frances inclined her head. 'Those are all things that would help a rising man.'

'Since he is a young man, and has eyes in his head, beauty would be a great additional advantage.'

'I suppose it would.'

'Well, Frances, do you know that woman?'

She answered one question with another: 'Where should one look to find such a woman?'

'To be sure, Robert is a man without family; he can't get over that. One may give him the manners of a gentleman, but nothing can make him a gentleman by birth.'

'If,' said Lady Frances, 'your cousin is a gentleman by manners and by instinct, what matters his birth? People may say behind his back that he has been in some kind of trade; that won't hurt him a bit. The fact that he has been a boat-builder of Wapping will never prevent his rising in the House. He is bound to rise. He will probably become in a very few years a Cabinet Minister. I suppose there is hardly any woman in the country who would not think herself fortunate in marrying a man sure to become in a few years a Cabinet Minister.'

'Meantime he is only a candidate for this distinction, and nobody, except yourself, Frances, and one or two others, knows that he is likely to get what he wants.

Therefore again I ask, Do you know of any woman—such as we desire for him—who would take him?'

'How am I to know?' she replied sharply. 'I do not look about the town in search of wives for my friends.'

'But you know everybody. Do you know of any woman who possesses all these acquirements?'

'You are very strange to-day, George. Your love affairs make you importunate.'

'You shall be as haughty as you please in five minutes, Frances.' I took her hand. 'My dear Frances, you have always been so sisterly with me; and now I am in this terrible trouble, and in order to get out of it, I must speak plainly—very plainly.'

'Well, George'—she threw herself back in her chair and folded her arms—'you may speak as plainly—yes, as plainly—as you desire.'

'Thank you. Well, then, do you remember a certain memorable day—a most disastrous day—when I came to tell you that my misguided parent had played ducks and drakes with the whole of my respectable fortune? I was very low in spirits that day.'

'Yes, I remember it well.'

'We had a good deal of talk about ways and means. I disgusted you by the absence of any healthy ambition.'

'You always have disgusted me that way,' she said. 'What has all this to do with your cousin?'

'I am working round to him. You will see the connection in a moment. Well, you fired up then, and became indignant, and looked splendid. I like to see you when you are indignant. You then uttered words—burning words. You said that all the time you had been watching another George Burnikel growing up besides me. You said that he was ever so much taller, handsomer, more ambitious, more industrious, more resolute, more everything. You said also that you had always hoped that, in the fulness of time, the smaller figure would be absorbed in the greater figure, and there would then be a George Burnikel worth looking at. Do you remember saying this?'

'Yes, I remember, at least, thinking in that way.'

'And I have often thought, Frances, that, if I could have become that bigger animal—the ambitious and the resolute—perhaps—I don't know, but perhaps—you might have consented. Well, I must not ask, because I quite understand that the thing was impossible. You have always been too great for me, Frances. I must be contented with Isabel, who has no ambition, poor child! and asks for nothing but love, which is pretty well all I have to give her.'

'I do not know what might have happened if things had been different.'

'I was even tempted, being so very small a creature, to assume that ambition, and to go about tricked with the feathers that pleased you. Being a humble barn-door fowl, I thought of pretending to be an eagle.'

'I am very glad you did not, George, because I might have believed you.'

'Oh! You would have found me out very soon. However, that nobler creature, that superior George, that imaginary person whom you figured, he does exist; he is, in fact, my cousin. Look at him, Frances; he is exactly like me, only bigger all over, body and brain. He is as ambitious as Lucifer, which is exactly what you want; also he is nearly as proud as my Lord Lucifer, which ought to please you; he is masterful through and through, which pleases you; he makes everything and everybody subservient to his ambition; he has learned an immense quantity of things, to serve his own ambition; he is eloquent; he is handsome; he has manners, though he will never acquire the conventional manner—why, that is in itself a distinction.'

'George, you were never so eloquent about yourself.'

'One cannot be. And then, which is something, he is a true man; when he says a thing he means it; he has no past to cover up, like so many men. He will never have anything to conceal in the future. And he will command the whole world, except one person—that person, Frances, is yourself. You are the only person who can rule him; for he worships you, as yet afar off, with no thought of worshipping nearer.'

'What do you mean, George? What authority or grounds have you for saying this? What has Rob—your cousin—said to you?'

'I mean exactly what I say. He has said nothing; but I have eyes in my head.'

'The man has never spoken one word that I could interpret in such a sense.'

'He never will, unless you bid him speak, and until he is released from his word; then you will find him eloquent enough.'

'Well, but even supposing so much, George, it is not in my power to release him. Why cannot he release himself?'

'No; but if a word of hope is authorized—in case.'

She bent her head. Then she looked up and laughed.

'George,' she said, 'you must indeed be desperately in love to undertake the *rôle* of match-maker.'

'That word of hope.' I took her hand, as if I had been her lover indeed, instead of only a go-between. 'What will you say that I may repeat to him? How shall I let him understand that your interest in him is personal?'

'George, you shame me! How can I send a message of hope to a man who is engaged to another woman? The thing is ridiculous. Go away and make him release that girl.'

'Yet I may say—what may I say?' I insisted.

'Say whatever you please, George. Go; you are a meddlesome creature. I hope your Isabel will prove inconstant. There are Stairs at Wapping—Old Stairs, I believe—and sailors convenient for inconstant maids.'

'You are interested in him. Confess, Frances,' I persisted.

She covered her face with her hands. 'Oh, George,' she murmured, 'I have always been interested in him from the very first.' She sprang to her feet. 'Tell him, George, if you wish, that I like a man to be strong and brave. Yes, I like a man to be capable of sweeping the curs out of his way, as that cousin of yours cleared the stage of those curs at Shadwell.'

'And this great gulf of family. How can it be bridged over?'

'He must build the bridge if he wishes to cross over.'

'My Lady Greatheart,' I said, and kissed her fingers, 'there is the poem, you know; the lines run like this:

'"In robe and crown the Queen stooped down
To meet and greet him on his way."

The metre is a little dickey in the next lines, but the sense quite makes up for that defect. The sense is entirely beautiful:

'"It is no wonder," said the House of Commons;
"He is so very much stronger than the whole of the
Rest of the House of Commons put together."'

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PROUD LOVER.

THENCE I proceeded straight to Robert. Man, I discovered, is in these matters more difficult than woman. Pride, to begin with—you shall see how horrid an obstacle was pride. Never before had I understood the ecclesiastical hatred of pride. I went about my business in the grand or diplomatic style. That is, I concealed the real object, and worked round to it. I believe that it is always easy to deceive a strong mind. That is to say, it is a part of strength to proclaim a purpose and to march straight towards it. It is your weak, knock-kneed persons who, having always to crawl and wriggle for themselves, see through the wrigglings of some and divine the intentions of others.

Robert was at work, of course. Nobody ever found him doing nothing. He looked up, welcomed his visitor, and carefully covered his papers. He never liked anyone to know what he was forging and contriving.

'Now,' I said, 'let us talk for half an hour. Then we will go and get some dinner; after that we will stroll about. What are you going to do this evening?'

'I thought of going to Lady Frances's.'

'Good. You see her pretty often, don't you?'

'Very often. It is quite impossible to see her too often.'

'Quite impossible,' I replied mechanically, watching his face. He was nervous when he spoke; he took up things and put them down. I had never seen him nervous before.

'I wonder if there are many other women like her,' he said slowly.

'There is no other woman like her in the whole world, my cousin.'

'She understands—that is the extraordinary thing—she understands everything; an argument; a position; a combination: one hasn't to explain or to talk about it—she understands. If she were in the House, she would lead it. She suggests a policy; she confers with Ministers; she catches the drift of the public mind; she knows how far they can go, and what they should attempt. George, I declare that I never before imagined it possible that such a woman could be found!'

All these things he had said before. Robert was not accustomed so to repeat himself.

'And now you have found her, Robert, and she is your fast friend. Of course, I've known her all my life; she has become a kind of sister, you know, by long habit; but my admiration of her is quite equal to yours. And have you nothing to say about her beauty?'

'She is the most perfect woman I have ever seen,' said Robert, his voice dropping, because when a man feels strongly on such a subject he doesn't like to talk loudly about it. 'Tall and queenly: she looks born to command'—the quality which he most desired for himself he must needs admire in a woman.

'But her beauty, Robert? Her eyes—her face—her features.'

'Yes. I think less of them—that is, of course, they belong to her—they make up the greatness and the splendour of her. If it were not for her beauty, she would not be half so queenly.'

'She advises you in your public work; does she talk to you ever of your more private affairs?'

'She knows my history, such as it is, of course. I was not going to her under false pretences. Besides, there is nothing to be ashamed of. I told her at the outset that I am but a Craftsman—a Master Craftsman.'

'Have you told her that you once—a good long time ago—promised to marry Isabel?'

Robert changed colour. 'No,' he said shortly. 'There was no need to tell her that.'

'I think, if I were you, Robert, I should tell her.'

'Why? What is the use of telling her such an insignificant fact?'

'Insignificant? Your marriage an insignificant fact to your best friend? Why, Robert, it is the most significant fact in the world. All your future depends upon your marriage.'

'It will not come off for years; I must make my position first. You must know I cannot take upon me for ever so long the burden of a wife—and a wife who would only pull me down instead of helping me up.'

'I know that very well. You want a wife who would help you up.'

'What does Isabel understand about these things? Nothing. What does she care? Nothing.' His voice showed the bitterness within him. 'Has she shown the least interest in my ambitions? Why, from the very first she has been content to be my clerk when she might have been my companion.'

'Come—come—you have never given her any encouragement. You never suffered her to think of being a companion. She has always been afraid of you. She is afraid of you still. Robert, I shouldn't like to marry a woman who was afraid of me.'

So it began all over again; but this time with results.

'There is no question of like or dislike, unfortunately.'

'I would let her go before the wedding-bells began to ring.'

'You forget, George. I have promised to marry her. I will keep my promise—some day.'

'All very well. But there is her side of the question. Is it fair or right to keep this girl waiting for you year after year—living almost alone in that corner of the earth, wasting her youth, wasting her beauty, longing for love, every year widening the distance between you, while you chafe at the chain you drag and she droops and languishes in bondage?'

'I must keep my word,' he repeated obstinately. 'And, besides, Isabel promised to wait for me as long as I choose. She knows she has got to wait. As for my marrying now, she knows, and you know, that it is impossible. What have I got to live upon? The money which you paid for your share, and about two hundred pounds a year for my share. Do you suppose that I can marry and live among my new friends on two or three hundred pounds a year?'

'Then let Isabel go,' I repeated, as obstinate as my cousin for once.

'If I do, who is to protect the child? Am I to turn her, penniless, into the street? No, George, I am bound to her; and I must make the best of it. Otherwise——' His head fell.

I became more hopeful. When a man—any man, the most obstinate of men—talks about making the best of it, he would certainly like to get rid of it.

'A man like you, Robert,' I went on after a bit, saying the thing which was in his mind at the time (there's a diplomatic move for you; always, if you can, make use of the other man's own mind), 'wants above al things a wife who will stand by him, and think for him, and advance him by her influence and her personality. The wife for you, or for any man with such ambitions as yours, should supplement your qualities; she should be well born, well mannered, influential; well considered, beautiful, and rich.'

'Should be—yes, should be. But there is only one such woman that I know of——'

'Yes. There is only one that I know of. Her name is Lady Frances.'

He sprang to his feet and began to walk about.

'What do you mean?' he asked. 'I believe you've got something or other up your sleeve. Out with it, man. Don't let us have any fencing here.'

'I mean that with such a wife as Lady Frances to back you up, and with your own abilities to help you on, you would be quite certain to step into your place in the front before very long—far sooner, Robert, than you can hope to do by your unaided efforts. That is all I mean.'

'It is impossible. There is, first—Isabel in the way. You are a good fellow to think about me—I don't believe any other man in the world would do so much for me. But no——'

'Never mind Isabel for the moment. Let us talk only about yourself. Do you—do you——' I remembered the stipulation in the other engagement about the foolishness of kisses: did the man, when he made that stipulation, understand, the least in the world, the meaning of love? Had he ever felt any kind of love at all for poor Isabel? and I put a leading question: 'Have you the—the kind of regard for Lady Frances which you ought to have for the woman you would marry? I don't mean the kind of regard which you have for Isabel, because she is not the woman you would marry.'

'Man!' he cried passionately; 'you don't know—I haven't told you. Nobody would think it possible that I should have the presumption.'

One has seen the passion of love represented on the stage, with exaggeration, as we think everything on the stage must be exaggerated. One has read of the passion of love in the older poets, with their hot flames, and darts, and swoons, and fierce consuming fires, and ecstatics, and raptures — exaggeration, we say. One reads of love in modern novels, and sometimes we ask how these writers can set down the exaggeration of passion with which they do sometimes regale their readers. Henceforth I declare that I shall never witness a love scene on the stage, never read an Elizabethan love poem, never read a burning page in a novel, and be able to call it exaggeration. Because the confession, the scene, the monologue, the unfolding of a heart, which now I witnessed, proved to me that there can be no exaggeration in poet and dramatist. Imagination cannot cross the bounds of possibility in love. They spoke of flames and fires, because there are no words with which to speak of the strength of the passion which may sometimes seize and hold the heart.

Yet only in the nobler natures, in the strongest men, and in the men who have never known before the smarting of love, nor wasted the passion that is in them on objects unworthy.

This man, hitherto so cold to love, so contemptuous of women, now raged about the room like a caged wild beast. It seems a breach of confidence only to hint at his broken voice, his distorted face, his features aflame, half shamed, while he confessed the passion which possessed him.

'George!' he cried, 'I worship her. Yes, for every quality that she possesses—for her quickness, for her sympathy, for her insight, for her beauty, for all, for all, I worship her.'

'You do well,' I said weakly.

But he regarded not what I said.

'Good heavens!' he went on; 'I count the hours between my visits. I make a thousand excuses to go there. When I reach the door, I remember that I was there only yesterday, and I creep away again. I lie awake at nights thinking of her. The only time when I am not thinking of her is when I am at work, for then I am doing what I know she would approve.'

I murmured something, I know not what.

'I confess to you, George, I want no other music than her voice. I think I could gaze upon her face and in her eyes for ever, and never grow tired. Only to pass other women in the street makes me angry to think that they look so small and common.'

'They are small and common, perhaps, because they are meant for small and common lovers.'

'If you come to think about her beauty, why, I hardly ever think of it except that it is a part of her, always a part of her; and she is always in my mind.

'Poor Robert! Yet perhaps there may be hope; no woman is so far above you as to be impossible.'

'Hope? How can there be hope? Don't talk nonsense!'

'I should think—but, then, I am not a woman—that love like this, so real, so full of worship, does not come often in the way of a woman. I can tell you, if the fact afford you any hope, that Frances has refused men by scores. She will never marry any man—I am quite sure; she has told me as much—unless he is a strong and able man. Why should such a woman give herself away to a man of the lower nature?'

'What hope can that bring me? George——' And here he broke out into a torrent of passionate cries and ejaculations. For my own part, I kept myself in hand. I let him bring it all out. Every ejaculation, every word of the confession, strengthened my position.

'Always in my mind,' he concluded, throwing himself into a chair, 'always in my mind, day and night. There! now you know!'

'Yes, now I know. I have guessed as much a long time. Of course it was inevitable. You were bound to fall in love with her, from the beginning. That was certain.'

'I might ask why you took me, then, if it was certain. But I don't ask. For I would rather go on hopelessly all my life, than never meet and speak with her at all. Yes, I have had to thank you for many things, George, but for nothing so much as this.'

'Thank you, Robert,' I said. 'Well, you are in love at last. That is the cardinal fact. Poor Isabel! You never thought of her like this.'

'Never. Poor child! Don't imagine that I ever thought of Isabel in this way at all. I was only sorry for her. I thought that her father was dying—and she was a very good clerk—so I said I would marry her, partly to keep her on as a clerk, and partly to protect her from poverty. It didn't seem to me that it would make any difference to my future. But as for love! How could one love a girl and despise her for her intellect?'

'You have no cause to despise Isabel,' I replied, with some wrath. 'Let me tell you that. You never took the trouble to consider her intellect at all. Well, the long and the short of it is that, whatever else happens, you must let her go.'

'No, she must release herself. I will never go back from my word.'

'Well then, Robert, here is a bargain. If I bring you her release—by her own wish, written in her own hand; if I show you that she will not suffer but rather gain in the long-run for her release; if I can assure you that she will be happier for the present by being released—will you accept that letter of hers and let her go?'

Anybody else would have understood at once what I meant. Robert did not. He had not yet acquired the habit of thinking about other people and their motives and minds. That would come by contact with a sympathetic woman. He told me afterwards that it seemed to him the very last thing possible, for me to fall in love with Isabel—whom he himself could not love—and to desire to marry a girl without any knowledge of society. Perhaps, being new to the thing, he thought at this moment too much about society. Perhaps I knew a great deal more about society, and therefore thought too little of its advantages. Besides, I was now a boat-builder, quite disconnected from society, and I really never asked whether Isabel was a woman who might be relied upon to shine at her own receptions, and to receive at her dinner-table the most distinguished people in political circles.

'You make three conditions,' he said. 'Every one of these seems to me impossible. Yet you have a way of your own. I do not believe that Isabel will send me a release; after these five years she has grown accustomed to consider me as her future husband. She moves in a groove; she considers me as her guardian, and her father as my dependent. No; Isabel will never release me—she cannot.'

'But,' I insisted, 'supposing these conditions to be fulfilled?'

'Oh, if they are fulfilled, of course I am the last man in the world to keep a woman against her wish. If she would rather marry a foreman of works——'

There was the least touch of coldness; perhaps no man, not even my cousin Robert, likes to be dismissed by any woman.

'That is settled, then. And now to return to Lady Frances.'

He shook his head. 'Oh, that is hopeless.'

'I am not so sure. Consider the thing from a political point of view. You offer yourself, with your career; she brings herself, with all that it means—an immense contribution. Perhaps she may think in her modesty that your side of the balance lifts up her side.'

Robert shook his head again, but with less firmness. The shaking of a man's head is a most expressive gesture, because there are so many shades in it.

'Next, we will consider the situation from a personal point of view. Frances is in every way admirable and delightful, it is true.'

'Yes,' he sighed—'admirable and delightful.'

'But you, my cousin, are not a bad specimen of a man—well set up, and well looking, and well mannered. And you are a masterful kind of creature, and women admire masterfulness in a man. And you have already shown cleverness, and women admire cleverness.'

'Yes. It is all very well, but——'

'And then the lady is a young widow, her own mistress; free to please herself, and she has shown herself difficult to please. She is wealthy, and——'

Here he jumped up again. He was very jumpy this afternoon. 'Yes,' he cried; 'she is wealthy, and there—there you have the whole difficulty. We will suppose that she might possibly get over the differences of birth and rank, and all that, because they mean nothing. You perceive that Robert was as yet imperfectly acquainted with the true inwardness of things—birth and rank to mean nothing? Dear me! And to hear these words from my own pupil! 'They mean nothing,' he repeated. 'She is the daughter of an Earl, and I am a boat-builder. What do I care about that, eh?' He turned upon me quite fiercely. 'As if that could be any real obstacle! I am a man, I say'—he snorted in his wrath—'I say, a man in whom a woman may take pride. I know that very well. I believe that even Lady Frances—though she is all that she is—might take a pride in me. Lesser women,' he added, with his usual arrogance, 'would. Of course they would.'

'Well, what bee have you got in your bonnet now?'

'Can't you understand? You say she is rich. I know she is rich. And that's the real obstacle. As for the rest, I have thought over all that you said by myself. Only I liked to hear it from you as well. It's the money, George.'

'What about the money? Now, don't go raising foolish ghosts about Frances's money. What if she is rich? What does that matter?'

'I have tried to get over it, and I can't. One must keep some self-respect. George, how would you like to live in your wife's palace—your wife's, not your own?'

'Her country house isn't a palace.' But it is, as Robert knew.

'How would you like to be every day sitting at your wife's table, not your own; drinking your wife's wine, not your own; waited on by your wife's servants, not your own; spending the money that your wife—your wife—chose to give you? No, I could not—I could not—say no more about it. I would rather remain as

I am, and go on thinking about her without hope all my life, than marry her for her money—for her money! Pah!'

'If you come to that, you might just as well say to another woman, "How would you like, all your life, going about enjoying honour—not your own, but your husband's; a name not your own, but your husband's?"'

'Nonsense!' said Robert; 'the things are not parallel. Of course a woman may take all that a man has to give.'

'And a man all that a woman has to give.'

What was it my solicitor had told me? 'Marry money—marry money.' And I despised that advice, and now I was trying to make Robert do just exactly that very same thing. Well, it was quite certain that this proud, independent person would never become a dependent on his wife. Fortunately I had a card up my sleeve.

'You are perhaps right,' I said, with assumed thoughtfulness. 'You could never become that unhappy creature—the man who lives upon his wife's money. You have got some hundreds a year, however.'

'And she has how many thousands a year? My whole income would not pay my share of the servants.'

'Then, again, a man and wife are not obliged to have equal fortunes. If one is a little richer than the other——'

'A little—oh, he says a little!'

'Go on; you will give me a chance presently.'

'Let her give away all but two hundred pounds a year; then we should start on equal terms.'

'No, because you would have still before you your ambition, with its solid side, and she would have nothing left. In ten years' time you might be drawing five thousand pounds a year official salary, and she have nothing more than her three hundred. No, Robert; the equitable way would be to reckon your future prospects and your future position as an asset worth ten thousand pounds a year, or anything you please a year.'

Robert shook his head. 'An asset is something that can be realized. No one would advance a farthing on the security of my prospects. As a business man, George, you really ought to know by this time what an asset means.'

'You are not going to a pawnbroker or a bank. You have an asset, I say, that in a certain lady's eyes would outweigh all her own advantages.'

'All the same, George,' he replied doggedly, 'I shall not stoop to live upon my wife.'

'You are nothing but a perverse, obstinate, and pig-headed *bourgeois*. You had better come back to Wapping. Come, then; I will meet you on your own ground. You admit that a few thousands more or less matter nothing.'

'I'm sure I don't know. All I do know is, that I've got about two hundred pounds a year, and that Lady Frances has got twenty thousand pounds a year, and that the thing is impossible on that ground alone.'

'It isn't impossible on that ground, if you could rise to the situation. You have done very well, Robert, so far; but you ought to throw off the last vestige of the shop.'

'What the devil has the shop got to do with Lady Frances and her money?'

'Why, you are not going into partnership! Her money would be simply a means of keeping you in a set of people and style of life necessary for your ambitions. It is a detail. You feel that you belong to that kind of life. You don't want to use her money for gambling, or for horse-racing, or anything at all. The roof, which would perhaps be hers, and the food, and the wine, and the rest of it, would be nothing—nothing at all—in comparison with the solid advantages of society and influence. You ought to rise above such considerations, really. I am ashamed that you are tied down by such unworthy considerations. They belong to Wapping-in-the-Ouse, believe me, not to Piccadilly.'

He laughed and shook his head. 'I cannot live upon my wife,' he said doggedly. 'Wapping or Piccadilly, I care not where I live, so that I do not live upon my wife.'

'Well, then——'

'Say no more about it, George; she is as far from me now as if I were at Wapping. I am sorry I told you. Yet, I don't know; it's a relief to tell somebody, and you are the only man to whom I ever told anything. Meantime, there's an end. She doesn't suspect, at any rate.'

I was for the moment diplomatically doubtful. I might tell him at once of the wonderful find that would clear away one obstacle at least. But, then, I knew so well beforehand the lofty scorn with which Frances would sweep away such an obstacle; how she would make him understand the paltry nature of her own wealth compared with the riches and abundance of his own abilities; how she would make him ashamed of his own weakness in not perceiving this fact for himself, and how he could become converted and resigned and submissive, this strong, proud man. Knowing all this, I would not tell him—yet.

'There are,' I summed up, 'three obstacles in the way. There is Isabel. Very good; you shall be released. Oh, I am not guessing. I tell you plainly that she does not care for you, except as a generous benefactor. You can't marry a girl who is only grateful. You have never made love to her.'

'Of course not; I had no time.'

'And therefore you cannot expect her to be in love with you. Moreover, my dear cousin, I have reason to believe that, if she were free to-day, she would be engaged to-morrow.'

'Oh! To some little clerk in the docks, I suppose. Isabel has no greater ambition than that.'

'Perhaps.' He had no suspicion at all, yet he knew that I had been wandering about with this girl all the summer evenings. 'Girls,' I said, 'are sometimes singularly free from ambition. Some of them want nothing but love and a tranquil home; they are easily contented.'

'I suppose that is so,' he said with pity. 'And so Isabel really wants to be released. That is the meaning of your mysterious offer, is it?'

'At least, she has always been afraid of you, as well as grateful. She would never want to be released unless she knew that you wished it. I shall fill her heart with happiness to-night when I tell her what you really want.'

'Then let her be happy—with her dock clerk.' His face cleared immediately, and he laughed. 'Poor child!' he said. 'She was a good clerk and a good accountant. How should her mind soar any higher?'

'As for the other obstacle, Robert, that objection, I tell you again, on the score of wealth—it is unworthy of you; it is also unpractical. You ought to be quite above such considerations.'

'All the same, George,' he repeated, 'to live upon my wife would choke me.'

'You shall not be choked, my dear Robert. This obstacle, too, shall be removed. Trust me—believe me—when I tell you, on my word of honour, that it shall be removed.'

I had, I say, the greatest confidence in Lady Frances and in the arguments which I knew she would employ to break down this heart of stone; but there was also the additional comfort of feeling that the bag of precious jewels was in that seaman's chest. How beautiful is the working out of the Doctrine of Chances! When one takes up a hand at cards there are millions to one against the particular hand that turns up; yet it does turn up—it always turns up—in the face of those overwhelming odds. So with that bag of diamonds. Everybody in the Wapping branch of the Burnikel family had examined that chest—turned it upside down, taken everything out—yet had never found that hiding-place. If it had been found at any time it would have changed the fortune and altered the future of the whole family. Robert would have been impossible. Had Robert been born, brought up and trained otherwise, he would have been quite another Robert. He would have understood, for instance—which he has never yet perfectly succeeded in understanding—the audacity of his ambition, and, as it would seem to those who know the world—but not to himself—its impossibility. Why do young men of obscure birth and poverty succeed so often and so greatly? Because they do not understand the audacity of their own ambition. 'I will win scholarships; I will go to Cambridge; I will be Senior Wrangler; I will be Master of my college; I will be Vice-Chancellor of the

University,' says the lad of parts, low down in the world. The lad of parts higher up understands that the very flower of the English-speaking youth are his rivals; that he must beat the best; that he must actually be the best; and he is discouraged. For climbing—for nerve and hand and eye—the poor boy has a far better chance than the rich. All our boys, before they are born, ought to pray for poverty—with brains and courage.

All these fine reflections passed through my head between my last speech and Robert's reply. He held out his hand. 'Trust you, George?' he said. 'Isn't it rather late in the day to ask that question? But how—how can that obstacle be removed?'

'I shall not tell you. Now go on without any misgiving, and conquer—if you can. Only, Robert, pray remember, this is not quite the same thing as the other venture, you know. Then you had to do with a schoolgirl—a child; now you have an equal. You cannot understand; you must stoop to woo, even you, O Samson.'

'Only an equal? An equal? Don't speak like a fool, George—you who know her!'

'You think that way at last. You have found someone to whom you are not equal. So much the better. But—I say, how about the foolishness of fondling and kisses?'

'Oh!' There rose upon his cheek the roseate hues of early dawn, yet he was six-and-twenty. 'Of course this is different—quite different. Isabel was only a schoolgirl, as you say. That kind of thing would only unsettle her at that age. This is quite different.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

RELEASE.

I found my mistress—it was nearly nine o'clock in the evening—in the parlour playing her thoughts to herself. The room had no light except that of the street-lamp, which showed her in her light gray dress, something like a ghost. She turned her head as I opened the door. In the lamplight I saw her sweet, serious face and her limpid eyes. I was dragged by ropes to fall at her feet. But I refrained. There was something to be said first.

'George,' she said, 'you are worried about something. What has happened?'

There must have been something in my eyes—yet the room was so dark. Perhaps she could feel in some magnetic way—the way of love—the presence of emotion. This kind of thought-reading is a branch of the science which has been too much neglected. It is, unfortunately, incapable of being put upon any stage, or even illustrated in any drawing-room. Which is, of course, the reason of this neglect.

'Isabel,' I said, 'you are a witch. Come into the study, and I will tell you why I am moved.'

The study was also in twilight, the light of the same lamp in the street falling upon the polished wainscot, and reflected about the room. My hand touched Isabel's, and again that temptation fell upon me to take the girl in my arms and to kiss her, and never to be weary of that kissing.

'You promised, George,' she said, reading my mind a second time. 'Not yet—not yet.

'I promised, Isabel, only until there was no longer need to keep that promise.'

'There is still the need, and greater need than ever. Quiet yourself, George—I can hear your heart beating. Tell me, or let me go.'

I lit the candles. 'I am quiet, Isabel.'

'Now tell me what has happened.'

'That need, Isabel, exists no longer.'

'Exists no longer? Is Robert dead?'

'No, he is living still; but that need exists no longer.'

'What has happened, then?'

'Sit down, Isabel. Take a pen and paper. So! Now, write at my dictation. It is the only act of obedience that I shall ever ask of you. All the future I shall be your slave. This evening alone I ask you to obey me.'

She hesitated. Then she sat down.

'Write: "My dear Robert."'

'I am to write to Robert?'

'You shall hear, if you will be obedient for this one and only occasion. "My dear Robert"—have you got that?'

'It looks very odd on paper. This is the first letter I have ever written to him.'

'Write: "I learn that you yourself are anxious that our engagement should be broken off." Have you got that?'

'But, George, anxious? Robert anxious? What does this mean?'

'Finish the letter. "To me it has always been a meaningless engagement, and really impossible. When you made that promise to me I was only a schoolgirl, and I was frightened. My only comfort was in thinking that it was to be a long engagement. I release you from your promise very willingly. You made a mistake, and you have been too proud to acknowledge it, though I have never ceased from the beginning to understand that it was a mistake.—Yours." What will you be — "yours sincerely"? That will do. "Isabel." Have you written it?'

'Yes, I have written it. But I do not understand it. Does he really and truly desire his release? Why?'

'He does, really and truly. But he will never ask you himself. The release must come from you.'

'You have not told me why. Is Robert going to be engaged to someone else?'

'Perhaps. You are not jealous? But of course not. How could you be jealous? I think it is very likely that he will be engaged before long.'

'No,' she smiled. 'I have no right to be jealous. He never loved me. I never cared enough about him to be jealous. His engagement was just a part of his kindness. It gave him the right to maintain us without the appearance of almsgiving. No, George, I am not jealous.'

'At present he could not afford to marry, unless it was some woman with money. He understands, however, that he has no right to bind you any longer to a loveless engagement. He says he has had no time to make love. If he marries, it should be to some woman of political influence, and with political friends, who would advance him.'

'He never thinks of anything at all but his own advancement. I wonder if he has a heart somewhere hidden away?'

'He has plenty of heart, Isabel, if you can get at it. The misfortune in your case was that while he was here the business of his own advancement did occupy all his soul, and all his strength, and all his mind, and all his heart. The ground is cleared now, and he has begun his march. The rest is easy, and now is the time for the flowers of passion to show themselves and to expand. We may look to see strange things before long.' With such shallow humbug did I attempt to veil the truth. But in vain. Women's minds are swift and far-shooting.

'There must be another woman,' she said thoughtfully, and not in the least jealously; 'otherwise he would not have considered the question of his engagement at all. Why should he? I am hidden away down here: he was not going to marry me for years—any number of years. He never writes to me; he takes no notice of me; his engagement did not make the least difference to him. Yet he suddenly expresses his wish to be released. Well, George, he shall be released. About that other woman you will tell me what you please.'

Therefore I told her all.

'Robert in love!' she laughed gently. 'I cannot understand it. Will he tell her, as he told me, that there is to be no foolishness of fondling?'

'I don't think he will, Isabel.'

She heaved a deep sigh. 'I have worked for him,' she said, 'for five long years—you will never understand how long those years have been. He is a hard master; he expects the best work always; no one must be tired or sick or weak who works for him.'

'A hard master indeed.'

'And never a word of praise or approbation. Oh, George! I have longed for a word of kindness. It was dreadful to be engaged to a man who was only a master all the time. Never a word of kindness would he give me.'

'He was absorbed, Isabel; he thought of nothing but the work—never anything of the people who helped in the work.'

'What was the work? What did he intend? He never told me. I was like a man blindfolded dragging a heavy cart along a road that led whither he knew not. Well, he wants his release; he shall have it,' she repeated.

'Since he wants that, Isabel, forgive him all the rest.'

'I have forgiven him, George. I have forgiven him since you came—and—and—and since my heart was softened.' The tears rose to her eyes.

'Isabel!'

'Are you sure, George, that he desires his release?'

'Quite sure. Robert knows that I have come this evening with the intention of asking you for it.'

'Then I will write him a longer letter than this.' She tore up the little note that I had dictated, and wrote another and a much longer letter. 'I shall not suffer my loveless lover, my patient bridegroom, to depart without a little explanation. I am glad—oh, so glad!—to be released. But, still, no one likes to be told to go without a little understanding of things.'

It was certainly a much finer letter than mine. But then, you see, I was thinking of nothing but the release, and Isabel was thinking of what the man had done for her.

'Dear Robert' (she wrote),

'George tells me that the time has come when you desire the termination of our engagement, entered upon by you out of pity. You wanted an excuse for maintaining two penniless people—one of them helpless, and the second too young and ignorant to be of much use. I understand now exactly why you forced this engagement upon yourself without any thought of love. That was four years ago. I was then seventeen, and am now one-and-twenty. During this long time I have looked for any word of interest, for any look of affection from you. No such word or look have I ever received from you. It has been quite plain to me, all along, that you had no kind of love for me. I could not tell you this—partly because we owe you so much that we must always do whatever you desire; partly because it is hard for a woman to say such things; and partly because I was afraid. That you should release me, therefore, is a great relief to me. It must be unhappiness enough for a woman to marry a man whom she does not love: it must be far worse if that man does not even pretend to love her.

'You are quite free, Robert. You have lifted a great weight from my heart. You will be far happier yourself without the fetters of an engagement which had proved impossible. You must marry a woman who will help you in your ambitions. This I could never do, and when you become a great and famous man you will be pleased to remember that you released one who would feel no pride in your success, and could take no part in your ambition. And so I am always, and just as much as ever, your grateful and obedient servant, clerk, and housekeeper, but never your bride,

'ISABEL.'

I took the letter and placed it in an envelope. It was done. Robert had got his release, and Isabel was free.

'Oh, my love!' I cried, and held out my arms.

'Oh! No—George!' She shrank back. 'Not so soon. Oh! I am like a newly-made widow, but I am full of joy. Is it right? Oh! George—so soon!'

'Isabel! At last! At last!'

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCLUSION.

I SHOULD very much like to tell you exactly what Robert said, and what Frances said, and how he played the wooer, and how she accepted the wooing. I cannot, however, for the very sufficient reason that I have not been told by either what passed between them. It is enough that Frances accepted as her husband this man of the people, who will remain a man of the people, though he has joined a party, and now fights under the banner of his party, and is almost the party chief. He will remain a man of the people, working for them in legislation so far as laws can help, which is not much: by teaching, by addresses, by writing. He can never cast off the early conditions of his life, nor get rid of the early impulses, nor forget the nobler ambitions. What was it that Frances said? The lesser nature puts the reward first and the work second; the nobler nature puts the work first and the reward second. There lies before him, unless accident prevents, a long and perhaps a successful career; the labours of the future may wear him out, though this kind of work seems to prolong life and strength; he will have beside him a woman as strong as himself in her way, full of sympathy with his work, full of admiration for his strength; a woman who loves him all the more, perhaps, because he needs not so much as some men do, the support and encouragement of love. I think of them, not as those who cling together like the columns of a cathedral aisle, but as those who stand together side by side; but the man looks out upon the world, and the woman looks up towards the man.

And now there only remains to tell you about the diamonds.

Robert brought her down to Wapping. She came to tea with us—the homely *bourgeois* five o'clock meal which Isabel prepared, just as she had prepared the little banquet for my first visit. I laughed when I saw once more this noble spread: the plate of ham in slices, the plate of shrimps, the cakes—half a dozen kinds of cake—the biscuits, the muffins, the buttered toast, the thin bread-and-butter. Isabel saw nothing to laugh at; nor, indeed, was there. Tea, considered as a meal, is most properly graced by these delightful accompaniments. And it is the principal meal, the most social meal of the greater part of our people, and the greater part of the American people.

To this feast, then, came the Lady Frances. She came dressed like a queen, with wonderful lace and embroidery. She looked like a queen, gracious and kindly. Isabel had put on a plain white dress. She had never looked better—my dainty mistress—than when she stood, so simple and so sweet, beside that reginal woman.

'George has told me about you,' said Frances, taking Isabel's hand. 'I have been wanting to make your acquaintance. My dear, we shall be cousins; we must be great friends.' So she stooped and kissed her, and I could see that she was pleased with my simple maid of Wapping Old Stairs.

Then the Captain was presented, and behaved as an honest old sailor should: full of admiration of so much beauty and grandeur, and not afraid.

Frances took off her hat, and we all sat down to tea, and were cheerful. The talking was conducted chiefly by Frances and myself. Robert sat silent, preoccupied.

Only from time to time he lifted his eyes and rested them for a moment on Frances with a softer light in them than I had ever seen before. Love doth tame speedily the most masterful of men.

Tea despatched, I took Frances over the way to see the Yard. I thought that Robert would perhaps like to say something to Isabel. What he did say was very simple and straightforward. He said, quite meekly, in the presence of the Captain: 'Isabel, I thank you for the release. You have forgiven me, I am sure, for what was meant for the best—a great mistake, a great cruelty to you, as now I understand.'

'Oh yes,' she said; 'it was impossible. Why did you not let me know before? But there is nothing to forgive. The gratitude remains, Robert, and the obligation; and you will be very happy, I am sure.'

'Believe me, Isabel,' he replied humbly, 'I could not be happy unless I was sure you were happy too, in the same way.'

As for me, Frances spoke very gracious words. 'George,' she said, not pretending in the least to be interested in the ribs of a barge which we were building—yet a beautiful barge—'you have brought me to this place of chips and shavings for no other purpose than merely to ask me what I think of her. Well, she seems a sweet and lovely girl; and she loves you, George. I saw it in her eyes and in her voice. What do you chiefly desire of life, George? Love and tranquillity, is it not?'

'Indeed, Frances, there seems nothing better to desire.'

'Then you will have the desire of your heart. But, George, if you have sons, remember that you have a hereditary title. Rank has its uses, and yours may be useful to them. Perhaps your sons may aspire. I can perfectly understand how Robert came to make so great a mistake—who could bear to think of that delicate creature turned out upon the world?—and I understand why Robert desired his release; and I understand as well, my dear George, that your Isabel will make you perfectly happy.'

Looking at this little speech as it is written down in cold language, I perceive that it has a suspicion of condescension in it, as if Isabel was good enough for me, and not good enough for Robert. But one cannot convey the manner of the words, which was wholly sweet and sisterly.

So she glanced round the shed, and stepped to the edge of the quay, and looked up and down the river.

'It is all impossible, George,' she said. 'I cannot understand how Robert came out of such a place, or how you could go into it. Why, it is nothing more than a kind of carpenter's shop.'

'By your leave, Frances, a boat-builder's yard. Chips and chunks and shavings belong to the craft of carpenter, it is true, but to that of boat-builder as well.'

'Well, I am glad that Robert is out of it. I confess, my dear George, that I could not live down here, nor can I promise to come here often—perhaps never again. All this side of life, with the warehouses, the ships, the wharves, the waggons, seems to me to belong to the Service. The place is kitchen, scullery, pantry, cellars. You and I were born in the class that is served, not in the Service. I do not want so much as to see the kitchen. Yet you—well, I say no more. Curiosity brought you here, an interesting couple made you stay here, love has chained you here. Let us go back to the others.'

The moment had arrived for my surprise, which I had arranged with the greatest care, so as to produce a fine dramatic effect. I took the party into the study. On the rug before the fireplace stood old John Burnikel's sea-chest, hidden by a table-cover. No one in the house, not even Isabel, knew what I was doing. And even Isabel did not know why I did it.

'This, Frances,' I said, 'is Robert's study. In this room he learned all he knows.'

'It is a beautiful old room. I had no idea that there could be among these warehouses so lovely a house. This wainscoting is worthy of any house, however fine. So this was your room, Robert, was it?'

'This was my room. What have you got on the floor, George?'

'You shall see directly, as soon as Frances has done admiring the walls. Sit down, Frances; sit down, Isabel. I am going to show you something of interest. Now, Robert, remember the last talk we had. We spoke of obstacles—did we not?—in the way of a certain event of some importance to you.'

'Yes, we did.'

'I told you that the first obstacle was waiting for your wish to be expressed. Is that obstacle removed?'

'It is.'

'The second obstacle was a difference in birth and social position which cannot be removed, but may be trampled upon.'

'We have trampled upon it,' said Frances, for her lover looked at her. 'Robert has forgotten that there ever existed this apparent, not real, obstacle.'

'There remains the third obstacle. Shall I remind you of what you said?'

'I said that it would choke me to live upon my wife's money.'

'And now you say?'

'Let me say it for him.' She still held her hand upon his shoulder. Yes, I am quite right: she will not cling to her husband, she will stand beside him—the Queen Consort. 'Robert forgot that wealth is nothing. It can give me no more than a house, and servants, and carriages. It is of no other use to me. But it may be of use to Robert, and he takes it—with me. It is a part of me; he takes me altogether, just as I am. The woman herself, with her heart, and her soul, and her thoughts, and her abilities, if she has any, and with the woman her rank, and her family, and her wealth. Is that so, Robert?'

'It is so, Frances,' he replied humbly.

'Wealth may be useful to such a man as Robert. It is good for such a man to have a well-appointed house. Freedom from money anxieties with some men is almost a necessity. Do you not agree, Robert?'

'You have made me understand,' he said. 'I thought I was asserting my independence when I was only betraying narrow prejudice. That you—you should give me money shames me no more now than that you should give me yourself, and that will shame me always.' Oh, the change in Robert, that he should say this!

'You know, you two,' Frances went on, 'I want Robert to become a great man. It is his ambition, and it is mine as well. I want him to become greater—far greater—than he allows himself to dream. I want him to be such a leader of men as has not been seen for many a century in this country. He must never be accused of mean or sordid motives; never be led aside by temptations which ruin smaller men. Oh! be certain that he will become what I think he may become. I would give not only all my heart and all my soul and all my strength and all my wealth—which is nothing—but I would give my very life—my heart's blood—at this moment to make him great.' She laid her hand upon his shoulder; he stooped and kissed her forehead, and in his softened eye I saw—oh, the wonder of it!—actually a tear! In Robert's eyes, a tear! This foolish love makes schoolgirls of us all. And Frances was splendid—she was splendid.

'Well,' I said, after a moment, 'things being as they are, I am inclined to stop. However, we must carry this thing through to the end. I understand, Robert, that you no longer desire that kind of equality of which we spoke the other day.'

'No longer,' he replied. 'I would rather owe everything to—Frances.' It was quite pretty to notice how he dropped his voice at the very mention of her name. 'Everything,' he repeated.

'I am truly sorry, Robert,' I continued, 'to disturb an arrangement which is so beautiful. But when I told you that the obstacle of comparative income was removed, I meant more than its removal by Frances, though of that I was certain. I meant, my cousin, that I was able to place in your hands a fortune which would go far at least to equalize things.'

'What do you mean?' asked Robert.

'I am now going to show you. In fact, Robert, I am about to restore to you, as the sole and rightful heir, the family fortune.'

'The family fortune? What is that?'

'Oh, basest of Burnikels! He has forgotten the lost bag of jewels.'

With these words I removed the tablecloth and exposed the sea-chest.

'The jewels? Is it possible that you have found them?'

'It is more than possible. Isabel, dear child, help me to take out the contents of the chest.'

We took out everything—the sextant, the Indian things, the mummified flying fish, the odds and ends, and laid them on the floor.

'I have done that a hundred times,' said Robert.

'What is the bag of jewels?' asked Frances.

'It is a bag full of the most lovely precious stones,' I told her. 'Our great-great uncle, John Burnikel, master mariner, possessed this treasure. How he got it I do not know. That is, a knowledge of the truth came to me in a dream, and I do know. Some day I will tell you. He used to say himself that an Indian Rajah, presumably the Great Mogul of Delhi, took him into his treasury and bade him fill his pockets with jewels in return for some signal services rendered to the Mogullian Dynasty. Well, he died, and his nephews could not find that bag anywhere, and nobody has ever been able to find it—until now. It was reserved for me to make this discovery. Is the box quite empty, Isabel? One moment. The nephews quarrelled over the loss, Frances; they fought, I believe; they dissolved partnership. One was my great-grandfather, and the other was Robert's. That's all the history. Now, you will observe that the box and all that it contains belongs to Robert. His great-grandfather bought or took over the old mariner's furniture. His own father bequeathed it to him. The box with all its contents, therefore, without any possible doubt, or dispute, is his own. Now, then, you've got nothing to say to that, I suppose, Robert?'

'I suppose not. But why so fierce?'

'Very good. I thought you might begin advancing absurd objections about other people's imaginary rights. It's all yours. And now look at the box. Do you see any possible hiding-place in it, Frances? See. It is empty; the sides are papered. I hold it up and turn it over. There are two compartments, both of the same depth. Is there any possibility of a hiding-place?'

'I can see none,' said Frances; 'but, of course, there must be. You are like a conjurer before he shows his trick. Why don't you turn up your sleeves, and assure us that there is no deception?'

'What do you think, Robert?'

'I have thought of a false bottom, and I have measured. I used to think that there is no possibility of a hiding-place. But I am now convinced that there must be, otherwise you would not talk in this way.'

'Well, look along the lower line of the pattern at the back—the thick dark line. Can you discern nothing?'

'No, no. Yet there seems to be a line not in the paper. What is that?'

'You shall see.' So I knelt down, opened my knife, and slowly passed it along the almost invisible junction of the shutter or lid of which you have heard. This widened the opening.

'There is a secret pocket, after all!' cried Robert.

'There is. This is a lid with a spring which keeps it tightly pressed. You do not look for hinges at the bottom of the box, and you do not observe the line of juncture. I think it is one of the most admirable hiding-places I ever saw, and I have seen a good many.

Now, Robert, I pull open this lid. You see this side of the chest is made of wood much thicker than the other side; also, if you look at the outside, you will observe that it widens at the bottom. The widening is designed by the cabinet-maker who made this excellent box, for in it he has cut out a narrow little cupboard in which anything could be hidden, and where nothing could be suspected. In this cupboard'—I pulled open the lid—'look, Robert—lies the bag.'

I took out the bag. It was, as I have told you, more like one of those long round things which they lay on the windows in order to keep out the draught. I gave it to Robert. 'There is your fortune, Robert. You are the heir to the family fortune. It is yours, and yours only.'

He received the bag with the awkwardness of one who has the most unexpected thing in the world sprung upon him.

'Pour out the contents, man,' I said. 'Let us see your treasure.'

He poured out the glittering contents on the table. There they were—diamond, ruby, emerald, turquoise, pearl, opal, chalcedony, and the rest; of all sizes from a seed pearl to a ruby as big as a pigeon's egg; diamonds worth thousands; pearls worth the ransom of an earl.

'Oh, heavens!' cried Frances. 'What are we to do with all these things?'

'They are yours,' said Robert. 'Let me give them all to you.'

'No; they are your fortune. They are yours. Stay, I will take them, Robert, in case at any time you may want something—I know not what. Oh! after all these years that you should find them, George! Oh! but you should have some of them.'

'Take half of them, George.'

'No,' I said. 'Your house is the best place for them, Frances. We will have none of them. Put all back in the bag—so.' I tied the mouth. 'Take it home with you, Frances. In the High Street of Wapping-on-the-Wall we want no diamonds—do we, Isabel?'

So she consented and took the jewels, greatly marvelling. And, lo! it was time for them to go. So we said farewell.

'We shall see each other seldom, Frances,' I said. 'We are setting off along roads that never meet. Perhaps in the years to come we may try to meet, if only to ask each other whether the tranquil life is better than the fight and struggle.'

So the two women kissed with tears, and Robert gave me his hand, and they left me down at Wapping-on-the-Wall—a Master Craftsman—with Isabel.

THE END.

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